

2

鎌池和馬

KAZUMA KAMACHI

illust.

真早

その名は
「ふーふー」

最強を
レベルカンスト
剣聖女
アトリリー
チェの弱点





ある人間と出会った。

世界と世界をまたいで、

出会うはずのない

二人が出会った。



その名は
「ふーふー」

最強をこじらせた
ベアトリースの弱点
2
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真早





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「まんまる」です、お二ついかがですか」

【???】
シスター



「お前が欲しい」

【マンドラゴラ】
イレアナ



「発言を許す。言うてみよ」

【吸血鬼】
カリカンザロス



「……ツツツ!!!? ??」

「まったくイケない癖です」

「???」
ファイリニオン

最強をこじらせた
アトリリーチェの弱点
2

剣聖女

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真早

Miss Filinion's Brutal☆Monster Encyclopedia (Full Color Edition)

The Detached Magic Palace existed in the center of Roppongi, Tokyo.

The 1km circle of land was surrounded by a tall wall and it was built with as much water and greenery as a park. The white mansion standing in the center was so luxurious it looked out of an older age, but the girl tended to use the small gazebo away from the mansion instead of the mansion itself.

The girl of about 16 wore a red dress with the shoulders and back open and her long glossy black hair was tied in twintails using a knot of the hair itself. She held a smartphone in her hand.

The gazebo she relaxed in did not contain chairs and a table to elegantly enjoy some tea. Instead, it contained a round jacuzzi.

So in her usual bad habit, she was floating face up after diving in without removing her clothes.

One of the maids standing around the jacuzzi screamed when she saw her master floating there.

“Gyaaah!! Milady, you just ruined another Robe Decollete worth as much as a dozen supercars!!”

The girl floating in the warm water was surprised to find the word “supercar” was still in use.

“Haruka, don’t get so upset. The country supplies me with this, so it isn’t actually mine.”

“Meaning it was paid for with the taxpayers’ hard-earned money! That’s all the more reason you mustn’t do this!!”

“Oh? But it’s already clinging pretty tightly to my growing body, so I’d have to get a new one in half a year regardless. Besides, there are people who need me to get a new dress this often. Y’know, like how they spend excess budget on road construction at the end of the year.”

“Cough, cough! No comment! I have no comment on how the adults do things, milady!!”

If Haruka, a girl who had just started middle school, was worried about the country’s excuses, then things were dire indeed.

The other two maids, normal (height-wise) Misoka and extra-large (breast-wise) Iroka, did not panic or make a fuss.

“The lady receives 15% of the total tax income, so this will not be a problem. You could say she is actually making use of the spare change she is given. In fact, the normal families would collapse under the weight of all the money if it were distributed fairly.”

“Are you sure this isn’t a bit of a compromise on the part of the higher ups since they won’t allow her out of the Detached Magic Palace? By the way, miss, you don’t seem able to put down your smartphone even when speaking with your servants. Have you found a new social network game or something?”

“It isn’t that,” said their master as she ignored the slight barb from the maid with glasses and a mole under the eye. “Filinon sent over her manuscript, so I’m checking over it. There’s a huge list of things she isn’t sure she can use...”

“Oh, the guidebook obsessed one of your Labyrinth exploration buddies.”

There were (at least) two worlds.

From the girl and her maids' perspective, the planet called earth was the "real world" and their human race had found a method of travelling to another world called Grandnir.

Filinion was obsessed with writing guidebooks on Grandnir's plants and animals as well as the underground Labyrinth's Gimmicks (contraptions resembling life forms that bared their fangs against any intruders), Traps installed in the floor and walls, and Treasure found in treasure chests. She had also released that information on a website in the real world.

Rather than to help people stay safe in the Labyrinth, she was simply the type who would die of loneliness if she did not see the hit counter rising but did not have the willpower to update a blog every day and thus filled the gap by updating her guidebook. Nevertheless, she was still helping quite a few people.

"What does that guidebook have to do with you, lady?"

"Filinion is a White Witch who specializes in healing. As a combat-oriented Holy Swordswoman, it comes down to me to defeat the Gimmicks, so she wants me to check through for any mistakes in their weaknesses and how to defeat them."

The red dress girl floated face-up in the warm water while tapping her index finger at her smartphone to type out corrections in red.

Punishment-type: Doppelganger

This Gimmick always takes on the form of one of your Party's members. HP, STR, VIT, and the other parameters are set to your Party's sum total with a +30% increase (Correction: A random increase between +45% and

+60%), so watch out. Its elemental weakness will be something no member of your Party can negate, absorb, or reflect (Correction: Or has at least a 25% resistance to), so if you cover every element, it will have no elemental weakness (Correction: Specifically, it will have a resistance of 50% against every element). When running across a Punishment-type it is generally a good idea to escape to another floor or area. But the parameters only allow it to borrow one of your forms, even if it cannot win. If the Doppelganger transforms into a logistical support member, there is a chance you can fight and defeat it. If you do, you get 5 of the ultra miracle rare Diamond Gears – Extra Large. (Correction: I do not recommend this! If anyone not at the level cap like us tries this, they'll be killed!)

That was about how it went.

(Why are all the attached illustrations in that pixel style? They look realistic enough, but that has to be way more work than normal illustrations.)

The red dress girl had plenty of questions about this.

But the glasses girl's guidebook had branched out beyond the Labyrinth's Gimmicks.

For example...

Break News: Sutriona.

The fairy queen and one of the paradoxes with a soul that move (Correction: She actually lives on the island) freely around Grandnir. She looks like a girl of about 10. When she fights, giant butterfly-like blood wings grow from her back and scatter the Sandstorm of Red Madness (Correction: On a large

enough scale to cover the entire inn town) containing the dangerous and toxic pigment created by the Crimson Heaven Flower reacting with fairy blood. (Correction: A small amount can intoxicate a 1000 meter Dragon, so it can easily break a human's mind.) She understands human language and has relatively similar ethics and standards, but that has allowed her to blend into human society enough that her route is hard to predict and avoid. She is essentially a monster, so do not even think about defeating her by human means.

Or...

Iberian Orc: Boo Boo

A giant orc living on the island of Grandnir. Also known as the Dragon Eater. Despite his brutal appearance, he does not enjoy battle and is relatively gentle. He has an extra-large Shining Weapon of unknown origin, but he cannot activate human Magic and seems to use it only as a blunt weapon. He attacks with simple strikes, but he has also fought a Break News and someone at the level cap, so his true strength is unknown.

"..."

"Oh, what is it, miss?"

The largest of the maids (who always had her black hair fully contained in her cap) spoke up, but the red dress girl continued operating her smartphone and seemed to be calling someone.

"Hey, cow."

“Is that any way to greet someone? So what is it? I’m in the middle of a college lecture right now...”

A whispered and gentle voice answered her. The voice was even more otherworldly or elegant than in Grandnir.

The other girl must have had a high-spec phone because it did not pick up any of the surrounding noise.

“Why are you trying to upload information on Boo Boo to your free guidebook!? You can’t do that! I-I mean, if you show off how great he is, everyone will start paying attention to him!!”

“Oh? I seriously doubt anyone will try to steal that 4 meter brutal pig-face from you. ...And if that’s what you’re so mad about, I’m guessing you haven’t gotten to that other entry yet. Ah ha ha.”

“?”

The floating red dress girl kept the call in hands free mode while she returned to the guidebook manuscript page.

And...

Level Cap Girl: Beatrice

Hates how small her breasts are. This representative member of the level cap adventurers only uses fire Magic, but has a stock of around 14,000 types at her disposal. This does not mean she is weak in water or wind. She uses fire as a starting point to reach every single Element, so be careful. She looks cute enough, but she had a low boiling point and has unbelievable attack power, so if you’re up to no good, I recommend doing it where she can’t see you. Hates how small her breasts are. If the compatibility works out, she can

slay even a Break News, so don't even think about defeating her in a fight. She also hates how small her breasts are. Only tease her about that if you have a death wish.

"You biiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiitch!!"

"Oh, c'mon, Beatrice. There's no need to be so crude. Oh ho ho."

"Not only are you violating my privacy, but this entry is 100% malicious, isn't it!? Even the pixel illustration is! I'm not that flat! And why did you repeat that about my breasts two or three times!?"

"Eh? Because-..."

"Don't you dare say it, you cow!! B-besides, mine are bigger than average. It might only be a few millimeters, but I'm above the 50th percentile for the national average. This is a misrepresentation! How exactly are you planning to make up for-...gbh, gbh, gbh!!!!!"

The girl tried and failed to gather strength in her gut as she yelled, so she lost her buoyancy and sank into the jacuzzi.

"Cough! Cough, cough!"

And after getting her head above water and choking, the black twintail girl realized all three sizes of maid were giving her a look of pity.

She worked to calm herself and to regain her dignity as their master.

"Haruka, I see no reason for you to feel sympathetic."

"Pwee!? S-sorry, but I seem to have hit a growth spurt recently..."

"Don't be silly! Mine are clearly bigger than yours!"

“...and they’re growing at a rate that will pass you in 6 months to a year!!”

“Gwah! How dare you leave your master in the dust!! You lack loyalty, Haruka!!”

At any rate, she was getting sidetracked. Her primary opponent was the cow on the phone: Filinion. But the red dress girl was not allowed to leave the Detached Magic Palace in the center of Roppongi. And she doubted Filinion would accept an invitation if she knew it would only mean a lecture.

That meant the black twintail girl’s options were limited.

“Remember this, Filinion...”

“Kh. But with a boring guidebook, you need to add in some jokes to keep things interesting. Y-y’know, like how that famous weapon and armor guidebook leaves you thinking, ‘Oh, so that’s what the Risqué Armor (♀) looks like.’ It’s hard to know just the right amount, but getting a little sexual is the way to go! Can’t we look at this as something like that? C’mon, c’mon. I’ll give you some of the Gimmick gears we use as currency over there. ...I know. How about 9 of the Silver Umbrella Gears – Medium? They’re super rare!!”

“Shut up. We can have this scary conversation later. See you later in Grandnir, okay?”

Yes.

Even if she was restricted in the real world, Grandnir was open to everyone equally.

Chapter 1: Warring Cat Sith and Cu Sith

Part 1

I hated myself.

I hated how I made everyone hate me.

I was so big and had so much strength, but I couldn't protect anything. No matter what I did, I would hurt someone. I would destroy everything around me.

I hated all of that.

And I thought about quitting.

No matter how hard I tried, I could never reach any kind of results.

[Omission]

But I found something even I could do.

I finally ran across it.

So I won't lose. No matter who I'm up against.

I simply can't lose.

Part 2

Let us review the basic information.

The red armored Holy Swordswoman had long hair that started out silver at the base and grew red toward the end. Boo Boo was the Iberian Orc she knew. He was nearly 4 meters tall and fought with a beloved club-shaped Shining Weapon that resembled a thick steel beam.

And that Shining Weapon apparently contained the digitized souls of more Iberian Orcs.

It had all begun when the humans had attacked the Iberian Orc village, but one of the humans had apparently not approved of their orders. Her obligations had prevented her from fully rejecting those orders, but she had left behind a slight hope of rescue by sealing the killed Iberian Orcs' souls in the Shining Weapon and leaving it with young Boo Boo, the sole survivor.

It was still unknown how to free those souls.

But some Magic that made it possible might exist at the far end of the Magic tree diagram.

As a Nonhuman, Boo Boo could not use Magic even with the Shining Weapon.

The human girls could learn Magic, but there was a limit to the Experience Points they could earn while exploring the Labyrinth.

But what if they joined forces?

What if they could choose to wash away that past resentment?

Only then could they possibly reach the world that someone had hoped for when leaving that thin, thin thread of possibility with Boo Boo. Only then could they possibly reach an age in which humans and Iberian Orcs could freely smile and live together.

“...Boo.”

In a Grandnir forest, the 4 meter pig-faced Iberian Orc named Boo Boo sat on a giant mushroom called a Table Shroom. He had only just returned from the surface after 2 days exploring the Labyrinth.

The silver and red haired Holy Swordswoman named Beatrice who had been on his Party smiled bitterly as she rubbed his back.

She displayed a map using fire illusion Magic.

“Look, Boo Boo. If you’re going to rest, why not get back home first?”

“But I’m so tired...”

If he wanted to, he could defeat a 1000-meter Dragon by swinging around his Shining Weapon which looked like a log or steel beam, but the Labyrinth was different.

The fluffy blond-haired White Witch named Filinion (who wore glasses and had endlessly large breasts) and the short green-haired Fighter Priest named Armelina (who was known for being tall with a flat chest) came to a stop to see what was up.

“Well, there aren’t any living creatures in the Labyrinth. Only the Gimmick contraptions and the Traps. When he can’t hunt, Boo Boo’s ravenous appetite can be a bit of a problem.”

“That’s a real problem we need to address in the future. 80% of what he carried was food, but it didn’t even last halfway.”

In addition to the Treasure, the Labyrinth (completely inexplicably) had areas with herbs growing from the floor or wall and the occasional pizza or dried meat lying around. (Had some other human dropped it?) However, that was not enough to fill a 4 meter orc’s stomach.

“We were reliant on your Mixing toward the end there, Filinion. Boo Boo might really have passed out without your Magic Meat.”

“Heh. Heh heh. I used up all my Painful Alraune, Universal Water, Transformation Branches, and even the ultra rare Protective Mistletoe, but it only made one hunk of meat... That felt like it completely ignored the principle of equivalent exchange... Eh heh heh.”

The White Witch laughed softly and fell into melancholy.

It had apparently cost enough for her shoulders to tilt diagonally and her glasses to slip down

Beatrice used her fire illusion Magic to draw a few square frames and lines in the air. Boo Boo was undeniably powerful in battle, but no matter how many times she calculated it out, his rate of food consumption was abnormally high. Getting the cost effectiveness right would be a task for a later date.

Boo Boo sat on the dirt ground and swung his thick arms.

“And those passageways are too narrow. I don’t even remember how many times my stomach got caught.”

“But you also broke right through the walls to travel straight across the floor, so I think that one cancels out.”

“Yes, yes. There is a lot we still need to get used to, but if you add it all up, I think Boo Boo ends up being a major benefit.”

“Ah, wait!!” frantically shouted Beatrice.

After all, White Witch Filinion had recovered from her desperation and started rubbing up against seated Boo Boo’s chest.

His bestial scent had to be powerful, but the glasses girl did not seem to mind.

“Ahh, it’s a relief to have such a strong shield or tank or whatever. Beatrice and Armelina are supposed to be the vanguard, but they’re so obsessed with fighting that they never listen when I tell them to protect their rear guard healer. I’ve always been left alone as I try to Mix things. But now we finally have a solid wall who is enough of a gentleman to worry about the rear guard!!”

“Yeah, yeah. I’ll protect you next time, so get away from Boo Boo!”

“Beatrice, if you get anywhere near me when you’re going all out, you’ll probably accidentally blow me to smithereens, so no thank you. Boo Boo is so much more reliable because he only uses physical attacks without any Magic at all.”

“You’re the type that latches onto anyone useful and gets as much out of them as you can, aren’t you? What a pain. You’re like a slot machine bonus round that can’t actually be won.”

They continued their lunchtime restroom talk while walking down the forest path. They were headed to Boo Boo’s house in the mountain instead of the inn town which had been built for short lodging or the exchange of information and materials.

Boo Boo’s house was not particularly close to the Labyrinth’s entrance, but they had a simple reason to go out of their way to visit.

“Under Lake 31 had a largescale exploration plan, so...yeah, they’ll definitely be there.”

“Boo?”

“There’s an underground profession known as loot robbers who attack people who are exhausted after returning. They’ll be waiting at the entrance to the inn town or in front of the medical, lodging, or Mixing shops. Having you with us has honestly been a lot of help, Boo Boo.”

Boo Boo’s house acted as a second home for them and it had an ideal location near a river but far enough away to not get caught in any flooding. It was really more of a tent with a triangular silhouette made from large tropical leaves, but it was quite large since it had to contain all of 4m Boo Boo’s tossing and turning at night.

And before entering that tent-like house, Beatrice noticed something and came to a stop.

“Huh? There are a lot less vegetables in the garden.”

An area of ground was separated out with a simple fence alongside the house. It should have contained all sorts of colorful fruits only seen in Grandnir, but it was clearly missing something. About half of it was gone.

White Witch Filinion, the guidebook obsessed Mixing expert, looked shocked.

“Oh, wow... You have everything from the all-purpose Molasses Grass and Nyandetta Fruit to the Joyful Belladonna, the Angry Digitalis, and the Sorrowful Sage!! None of this can be grown at the inn town, so you shouldn’t be able to get it without delving into the Flask Flower Garden which overlaps a Break News territory!!”

Hm? Is this stuff really that amazing? wondered Beatrice. She only knew that it included Flat Chest Eggplant, the nemesis of all teenage girls.

Boo Boo did not seem to understand either.

“I don’t really like vegetables much, so I don’t remember what kinds I have or how many.”

“Why do you even have a garden?”

Fighter Priest Armelina looked exasperated.

“It would be such a shame to eat these~ *[omission]* ~bla bla
bla~ *[omission]* ~All of these herbs start with what we call the All-Purpose Seed and the environmental factors like the soil and water determine which of countless flowers those identical seeds grow into. But when people try to grow them, they end up no better than weeds~ *[omission]* ~bla bla
bla~ *[omission]* ~So what I’m trying to say is, do you mind if I take these!?
Pant, pant!!”

They decided to ignore Filinion as she got all worked up and her glasses fogged over.

“But, Boo Boo, you don’t want people stealing the vegetables you worked to grow, do you?”

“That is how nature works, so it can’t be helped. And the animals that eat the vegetables here will grow and eventually fill my stomach, so it all works out in the end.”

“Hmm, I’m not sure the circle is quite that perfect,” said Armelina.

That was when a new face appeared.

It looked like a girl of about 10 with long silver hair, but she was actually the girl-type Break News named Suttriona. Her only clothing was the black ribbons wrapped around her body, a miniskirt, and the large flower decorations on either side of her head and on her back, so the outfit could be called a ribbon dress. The ribbon dress had been sewn by palm-sized

Fairies from the silk of the Ground Spider, so the skirt bloomed like a living flower and the cloth mysteriously moved just enough to keep anyone from seeing up her skirt no matter how vigorously she moved around.

“Oh, so you’re back, Boo Boo! Since you’re home, hurry up and make me some food. I’m so sick of the food my caretaker shrine maidens make. I’m in the mood for one of your super wild roasts!!”

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

“Boo?”

The humans’ all gave her suspicious looks and Boo Boo alone remained puzzled, so the paradox with a soul flinched back.

“Wh-what? Why are you all looking at me like I’m a thief?”

“Well, um...”

“I can’t think of a better suspect for the one arrogantly swiping Boo Boo’s food while he was gone.”

It was kind Boo Boo who helped her out.

“Stop it, everyone. If she was hungry, then it can’t be helped. I don’t care about the vegetables in the garden. Even if Suttriona ate them, it was only a part of nature, so we can’t blame her for it.”

That was the finishing blow.

Sutriona was viewed as something like a god in how she was revered and longed after as the fairy queen, but she finally caught on when she saw the sad state of the garden.

“Wait! Wait just a second!! It wasn’t me. The only plants I’ll pick and eat are Crimson Heaven Flowers. I rarely eat vegetables, so I would have no reason to steal them!”

“I don’t really like vegetables either.”

“Heh heh!!”

“Heh heh!!”

“You two, let’s find time later for some intense training to overcome that dislike.”

Boo Boo and Sutriona trembled at Beatrice’s frightening announcement, but they had not forgotten the main point at hand.

“Look! There are footprints in the garden dirt. Do you see that kind of paw pads on my feet!? See, it wasn’t me!”

“Hmm, they look like cat prints.”

Filinion was relaxed and Armelina cut in from the side.

“No, wait. The vegetable stalks here were clearly cut with some kind of blade. Would a cat or dog use that kind of tool? And do pure cats even exist in Grandnir???”

“Kh!?”

“Sutriona says she likes to go around the inn town pretending to be human, so she probably heard someone talking about cats and faked it.”

Everyone but Boo Boo gave the fairy queen suspicious looks.

Generally, the circumstances were not taken into account when it came to clever intellectual crimes.



“...me...”

Sutriona lowered her head and trembled as her voice spilled from her lips. When she raised her head, that voice grew in volume like a volcanic eruption.

“It wasn’t me!! I really didn’t steal it! I didn’t, I didn’t! But you’re all acting like I did!! Wahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!!”

Something pierced Beatrice and the others’ chests.

Given how she looked (even if she was actually untold centuries or millennia old), these things could do more damage than made any logical sense.

“Boo. Beatrice, Sutriona, and everyone else needs to calm down.”

“But!! Hic, but those three are being mean!!”

“I don’t mind that I don’t have as many vegetables.”

“That kind look means you don’t believe me, doesn’t it?!”

Wahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!”

She may have been the type who was willing to take on all the world’s hatred and malice but then felt horribly betrayed if someone she had decided to trust began suspecting her.

That said, the tears streaming down the childlike face had not actually cleared their suspicions. On the other hand, proving that Sutriona had not stolen any of the vegetables could easily turn into the devil’s proof.

There was only one expedient way of settling this.

“It would be fastest to catch the real culprit ourselves.”

“Sob, hic. V-very well!! As the Queen of the Harlots and the summoner of the Sandstorm of Red Madness that burns through people’s sanity, I will do everything I can to make them pay for framing me!!”

“Wait, wait, you damn paradox. Are you trying to turn Boo Boo’s garden into a toxic bog?”

It was clear that they could not let Sutriona handle this task and Boo Boo was too large to easily keep watch in secret. But this would probably take a while, so Beatrice and the others were also a poor choice since they could only stay in Grandnir for a few days.

The red Holy Swordswoman crossed her arms, thought, and used lines of fire illusion Magic to connect the frames for Boo Boo’s garden, Sutriona, and the culprit.

“Let’s set a trap.”

“I’m no good with detailed work,” said Boo Boo. “Whenever I try to make a pitfall to catch an animal, I fall in it myself.”

“This won’t be that difficult. ...Cow, as a Mixing specialist, you must’ve brought ‘that’ with you. Take it all out.”

“Eh? By ‘that’, you, um, don’t mean *that*, do you?”

Beatrice added Filinion to her diagram and made a coldhearted announcement.

“I’m talking about the Mandragora seedlings. The ones that scream when you pull them from the dirt and remove the souls of everything around them. Add some of those into the garden and it’ll knock out the culprit.”

“Wait, wait, wait, wait! Those are rare, you know? Ultra miracle rare! They’re a miracle!! A miracle with ultra added to it! Since you don’t seem to

get it, I'll put it so even an idiot can understand: Most of the medicinal plants used for Mixing come from this really pain-in-the-ass thing called the All-Purpose Seed, and growing them like normal leaves you with nothing but weeds! But when you have them as seedlings like this, it means you know they'll grow into Mandragoras no matter what, so they're exorbitantly expensive and I can't possibly waste them on something like this! I don't care if you have to bury everything but my head in the dirt, but isn't there any other way!?"

"..."

"..."

"..."

"Ah, I know where this is going... You're going to use Miss Suttriona's strength to force me to do it, aren't you? But that's not going to work this time! Deeeeeefense!! Deeeeeefenvarlmgchah!!!???"

A feminine scream echoed across the mountain.

Just to be safe, Beatrice had wadding in her ears instead of earplugs, so she only knew something had happened because of the unnatural ripples formed by the vibration of the water in the water jug.

"That was fast."

Beatrice pulled the wadding from her ears and stuck her head out of the leaf house.

"Yes, they hit them right away."

Several small figures were collapsed on their backs in the garden. They all held what looked like lewd carrots with the end split into two. However, these were clearly not humans. They were about half Beatrice's height, they were covered in soft-looking fur, and they had cat faces.

It may have been a trait of their species, but they were all wearing tiny maid uniforms for some reason.

"Those are Cat Sith. They're called cat fairies and you don't see them very often."

The Fighter Priest who was surprisingly fond of cute things spoke up wildly.

"But that's odd... They're supposed to live in the trees in the southern forest, which is a mangrove-like place, so you don't often see them in this area..."

They were more or less cats that walked on their hind legs like humans. They used tools like normal and they were carrying primitive spears made by attaching a sharp shard of pottery to the end of a stick.

Armelina introduced them.

"It's salt. The southern forest has a very high salt content due to a few geysers that spray out Diamond Salt. That salt is actually stronger than your average stone, so they make all their houses and ships out of it. ...And I hear all their signature dishes are things like vegetables pickled in salt or meat cooked in salt."

Then Suttriona grew angry with them.

She clung to Boo Boo's giant body like she was riding on his shoulders and she wrapped her arms and legs around his head like it was a giant round

cushion. She supposedly did not wear any underwear, but that did not seem to matter to her.

“See? It wasn’t me! Boo Boo, what are you going to do about this failure!?”

“Boo. I’ll give you some Dew Tea later, so can you cheer up?”

“Do I look that much like a shameless starving character!? Bite, bite!!”

“Ow, ow! I’ll apologize, so stop eating my head!!”

Meanwhile, the glasses girl who had lost all of her Mandragora seedlings had grown all gray and dried out.

“Heh, heh hee hee hee. By the way, what are we going to do about these Cat Sith?”

“I don’t really want to eat them,” said Boo Boo. “They don’t have much meat and don’t look tasty.”

At that very moment, the Cat Sith unsteadily but frantically got up, perhaps due to the mention of eating them. But the damage had left the stuffed animal maids too weak to flee.

“Oh, no! We’re going to be eaten!? There’s nothing we can do against a terribly cruel Iberian Orc!!”

“That’s why I said this was a bad idea! This is the Dragon Eater who can make a meal of a Dragon. We’ll just be a tiny snack if he catches us!! Like a guy’s home cooking!!”

The thieves grew fierce, but Beatrice smiled at them.

Yes, when she saw a puppy, a kitten, or anything else that acted like they deserved love because of how cute they were, she only found them impudent!

So the girl made a smiling suggestion.

“Don’t worry, Boo Boo. Even if they don’t have much meat, you can increase the volume and sumptuousness by cutting open their bellies and filling them with mushrooms and herbs before cooking them. Fire is my specialty, so you can leave that to me.”

“Gnyaaahh!?”

“Gnyaaahh!?”

The cat fairies collapsed and just about wet themselves, so they began earnestly begging for their lives while shaking with fear. They suddenly grew much more polite.

“B-but we had no choice. We never would have visited the Dragon Eater’s forest otherwise. This was the only way we could survive!”

“I haven’t heard anything about a lack of food around here. Is the southern forest having trouble?”

“I-if we only had to eat and sleep like normal, we would be just fine,” said one of the Cat Sith. “But the offering to the Break News has put such a great burden on us that we had to start fighting those vile dog fairies, the Cu Sith!!”

Part 3

Now, then. Things had gotten complicated.

It sounded like a long story, so they all returned to the leaf house where, for some reason, they found a dish cooked from a Bucket Ostrich Egg larger than Beatrice’s head. The entire egg had simply been wrapped in a large leaf and then cooked over a fire.

They were probably meant to all grab off pieces as they spoke. Beatrice recalled that Sutriona had asked for something “super wild” after growing tired of her shrine maidens’ food.

The dense egg had a naturally sweet aroma reminiscent of vanilla, but its umami could be increased by adding a little rock salt. If it was steamed, it would likely become a pudding-like dessert. It was quite good, but a girl would have to work up some courage to eat something that large on her own. That was why Beatrice and the others were so excited to have a chance to eat it together.

But there was a reason they could do that.

“Oh! If I’d asked that Fairy that hangs around this house, I could have cleared all suspicion against me right away!! Curse Meridiana. She had to have been somewhere nearby!!”

“That palm-sized girl isn’t going to show up in front of people. We dealt with her a bit during the Thousand Dragon stuff, but it’s not like she actually got over her shyness.”

As Sutriona had said, a palm-sized Fairy had moved into Boo Boo’s house and she had been saved by Boo Boo when she had tried to sacrifice herself to the 1000 meter Thousand Dragon. Fairy blood could apparently intoxicate a giant Dragon, so it had a habit of eating them.

But that aside, Beatrice split up the dessert egg, placed the portions on large leaves, and stopped talking. Then everyone focused on a single point: the Cat Sith maids that were trying to be as small as possible.

“I have no interest in your dispute, but I must know why you have entered my territory and caused trouble here. Answer me, you damn cats. Refuse and this Break News will show you hell.”

Sutriona sounded especially displeased (and her eyes and nose were still red). She continued to cling to Boo Boo's giant head while sitting on his shoulders and the cat fairies trembled as they responded.

The issue was between the Cat Sith and the Cu Sith.

"The cat fairies and the dog fairies were originally very close because there are so many similarities between our habits and lifestyles."

"Hm? Is that why you ended up fighting over territory and feeding grounds?" asked the Fighter Priest while rudely sitting cross-legged.

But the cats shook a hand (or front paw?) in front of their faces.

"No, that isn't it. In a way, this is a much more serious problem."

"The moon...or rather, its waxing and waning are incredibly important to us. It relates to the creation of salt and is also directly linked to our vitality and energy, so we use the moon to schedule when to hunt and when to stockpile."

It had nothing to do with the issue at hand, but Beatrice was fascinated that they called that light in the night sky "the moon". Since they used the same name, it was likely the humans who had named it.

Meanwhile, Sutriona raised an eyebrow.

"I see."

"And then the problem occurred."

Boo Boo and the humans still did not understand, so one of the Cat Sith continued.

"One of the Break News is a Vampire that freely controls lunar eclipses. Her name is Kallikantzaros."

It was guidebook obsessed White Witch Filinion who reacted.

“Um, that’s a Break News that was only recently confirmed to be active, right? The scale is unknown, but she supposedly used a lunar eclipse and the moon’s gravitational pull to bring a high tide to the coast and produce swarms of bugs and crabs...”

“Technically, she was napping in a musty old coffin and only resumed activity recently.” Sutriona sighed. “It’s the same as a swarm of bugs. Any plant or animal affected by the moon’s gravitational pull is influenced by Kallikantzaros. Including the instincts at the foundation of their minds. The Cat Sith and Cu Sith are no exception.”

“What does that mean?” asked Boo Boo. “I don’t really get it.”

“It means whether they feel happy or sad can be manipulated by someone else, Boo Boo.”

They could see the problem now.

But that would mean the Cat Sith and Cu Sith should join together to challenge the Break News, so why would the cat fairies and dog fairies be fighting each other?

“We are no match for the Break News.”

“So the Cat Sith and Cu Sith worked toward our common interest by creating a salt altar in the southern forest. We made lots of offerings to Kallikantzaros so she would not cause a lunar eclipse.”

The situation had changed.

Beatrice’s face clouded over as she managed the information in her midair collection of frames and lines.

“But the lazy Cu Sith failed to make their offerings. And yet we promised to alternate which one of us left salted meat and salt pickled fruits on the altar to avoid placing too great a burden on any one of us!”

“So Kallikantzaros has continued her lunar eclipse control and we have received no rest. If the Cu Sith do not change their ways, we will be stuck like this forever! We don’t want to steal crops, but they’re forcing our hand!!”

The maid cat fairies were angry, but they were unlikely to target Boo Boo’s garden again anytime soon. Once Beatrice told them they were free to go, they bowed and left the leaf house.

They carried their spears with them.

They were intent on settling things with the similar Cu Sith dog fairies.

The first one to speak was Fairy Queen Sutriona.

“Now, what do you think?”

“This is too complicated for me,” said Boo Boo.

“I think there has been some damage caused by this lunar eclipse controlling vampire named Kallikantzaros.” Beatrice rubbed her slender chin. “But would a Break News really care about the people below them? I know the Thousand Dragon had an altar, but wasn’t that 1000 meter dragon king impossible to speak with and weren’t the self-proclaimed priests beaten to a pulp?”

That was how it was supposed to work with the Break News. It was rare to be able to speak with them like with Sutriona. Both on the language front and the shared values front.

“For me, it depends on my territory. If Kallikantzaros causes trouble in my territory now that she’s woken up, I’ll put her back to sleep forever, but otherwise I won’t touch this. What about you, humans?”

Beatrice, Filinion, and Armelina exchanged a glance.

“Well, the thing about that is...”

“We can’t watch those stuffed animal things spill each other’s blood and we’d love to stop it, but...”

It was simple enough to say, but this would mean facing one of the Break News, the paradoxes with souls who were said to have been born of a certain environment while also producing that environment. It was like an individual saying they would stop a typhoon or sandstorm.

With his extraordinary body, Boo Boo had once defeated the Thousand Dragon to save a palm-sized Fairy from being made a living sacrifice, but not even he could defeat Sutriona who also reigned as a Break News. It was unknown where in the hierarchy Kallikantzaros fell, but it would be suicide for even those level cap adventurers to rush in without a plan.

“Fighting is bad.”

Boo Boo was the only one with even a slight chance of success.

“But the same is true with Kallikantzaros. I don’t see why we should be allowed to make her cry just because she has a lot of power.”

That was another form of justice.

He would not give into his emotions and justify violence. Other than to live and to eat, he would not allow himself to wield violence. Whether he would continue to follow his personal rule or bend that rule held great meaning and a great price.

Holy Swordswoman Beatrice slowly sighed.

“If her category is Vampire, she probably understands human language. Whether we’re going to fight or not, why don’t we start by speaking with her, Boo Boo? We might be able to get her to stop the lunar eclipse without crossing blades.”

“Right. I’m fine with that, so I’ll go with you, Beatrice.”

“Really? I feel like a Vampire would actively try to attack humans.”

Armeline sounded annoyed, but White Witch Filinon spread out her guidebook written on parchment.

“But how exactly are we supposed to contact Kallikantzaros? She’s only just resumed activity, so I’m not sure what the range of that activity is.”

“That shouldn’t be a problem.”

This may have been an old acquaintance because Sutriana readily took over.

But...

“She’s always been stubborn about the weirdest things. Or you could say she has strange habits, so meeting her will probably be a real pain in the ass.”

She concluded with a rather ominous comment.

Part 4

And so...

“...I have a question.”

Beatrice sounded like she was cursing the world while walking on one of the roads away from the inn town.

It was early evening and some people were eating an early dinner, but this group was walking through a dark mangrove.

It was a different sort of fantastical than the forest around Boo Boo's leaf house.

There was seawater below them and tropical-looking trees up above. Beatrice and the others were walking on a narrow bridge made of whitish stone that seemed to continue forever at about a meter above the water. Countless bridges connected together like a spider web and their path sparkled as it reflected the moonlight.

The pale light came from both the bridges and the branches overhead. In addition to the white bridges crossing over at a higher level, there were a lot of beautiful white cubes measuring at a meter or two across.

Those were the Cat Sith and Cu Sith's homes. Those creatures were salt craftsmen who cut out the Diamond Salt hardened around the geysers to make houses, boats, or whatever else. The bridges Beatrice and the others walked on had been built up over a long period of time.

Along with the sound of small waves, a few white lights were moving within the darkness, but this was not a paranormal phenomenon. In Grandnir, it was common for people to pick large white flowers known as Lantern Plants, twist their stamen to make them glow, and carry them around like lanterns at night. The light had apparently originally been a way of gathering bugs to carry their pollen.

Despite the fantastical nightscape, Armelina was rubbing her temple while looking like she had woken up in the morning with menstrual cramps and she replied to Beatrice's question.

"Don't say it. We all think it's ridiculous."

“Why are we wearing swimsuits!? Why is this the requirement for meeting Kallikantzaros!?”

“I said not to say it! How can she call this disarmament!? There has got to be a better way of sealing the Percentage-type Magic that takes the form of our clothes!!”

While they yelled atop the Diamond Salt bridge, the two of them were equipped with the Girl’s Swimsuit, an item entirely unnecessary for exploring the Labyrinth. Specifically, Beatrice wore a red bikini with translucent lace over it and Armelina wore a modified white one piece swimsuit. ...However, this was an alternate world with no means of creating petrochemical products, so it was doubtful these had any defenses against growing see-through when wet.

Armelina made a gesture like she was messing with the temple of an imaginary pair of glasses.

“I guess I shouldn’t be surprised the swordswoman went with a bikini. And boob armor when you have no boobs? Have you no shame?”

“Wha-!?”

“And I bet you added that fluffy lace over the bikini itself to give the illusion of greater volume.”

“I have more than average!! And Armelina, don’t you feel like you’ve lost something important as a human being now that you can’t hide your flaaat chest? Oh ho ho ho ho.”

“Ahh!? You wanna fight!?”

“You’re the one that picked a fight with me!!!!”

Meanwhile, Filinion (the biggest one of all) remained calm.

The 4 meter Orc tilted his head, so the glasses girl quietly began her commentary.

“In human society, your rank is determined by your chest size. How boring.”

“Really? Then I’m the biggest one!”

“Yes, you are. Eh heh heh.”

As Filinion spoke with Boo Boo, she also observed the other plants and the things that looked like hermit crab ghosts growing from the surface of the mangrove trees.

“The Nun who made the swimsuits for us is apparently an expert at Appraisal rather than Mixing. A lot of craftsmen know her, so she introduces a lot of jobs to people and even I have used that to make a little money.”

“Ridiculous! Curse that Nun for selling entertainment Mixing items. The only upside is that she promises to use the Experience Point filled Gimmick gears for an emergency reserve!!”

Armeline had steam rising from her head (and had her back mostly bared), but the glasses girl had recovered quite quickly from losing her Mandragora seedlings. There was a simple reason for that:

“Boo. I can’t eat all of the vegetables in my garden, so you all can take any you want.”

That announcement had been a joyous reward for a Mixing expert. Beatrice and Armeline had not really seen the value in it, but it had been a treasure trove to Filinion.

“Um, one other thing. This southern forest is a hotbed for blood-sucking animals like giant ticks, fleas, leeches, eels, and bats. They react to human Magic and attack as a group. One theory for why the Cat Sith houses are made from Diamond Salt is because it keeps the blood-sucking animals out. Of course, this might be a defense mechanism set up by a human-hating Vampire who can control the moon’s gravitational pull and thus manipulate the surrounding animals.”

“Wait, glasses girl who isn’t actually all that smart.”

“Beatrice, I feel like you haven’t been treating me with much respect lately!”

The fluffy-haired glasses girl shed some tears saltier than the seawater, but the Holy Swordswoman only glared at her with dead eyes.

“You claim you didn’t get those giant boobs on purpose, but you’re definitely posing right now. And why would you choose a cow-print bikini, you Holstein breed!? Even the knee socks are cow print!!”

“Th-this was the only one in my size, so I had no choice! Curse that Nun... I would have loved to have your range of selection! I’m so jealous!!”

“Oh!? Then let’s chop those things off and cook them as yakiniku!!”

“Oh!? Then let’s chop those things off and cook them as yakiniku!!”

Due to that, the Holy Swordswoman could not call up her map like usual. This must have made her uncomfortable because she would occasionally fidget and either mess with the bikini’s knots or adjust the bottom.

Boo Boo alone gave them a puzzled look as the salt bridge creaked (a concerning amount) below him.

“Boo... I don’t really get what a swimsuit is. Why am I fine like this?”

“W-well, you can’t use Magic, so you don’t need a swimsuit to prove you’re disarmed.”

Not to mention that he always wore a loincloth and nothing else, so the Holy Swordswoman gave him a mature smile. She did not want to imagine that 4 meter body wearing a bikini or one piece swimsuit.

(Although he’s really cute on the inside.)

Even now, Boo Boo was holding up the glowing flower of a Lantern Plant to illuminate the dark mangrove. A closer look showed his large round shoulders were trembling.

“Boo Boo, are you still scared of ghosts?”

“All ghosts are really angry, so they scare me. I wish everyone could smile more.”

“I think all those ghosts are weeded out because they can rest in peace.”

With a mechanical beep, a red light appeared beyond the trees and ocean surface.

Boo Boo jumped straight up (and nearly broke the bridge when he landed).

“Squeal!? Something just glowed!”

“Someone on earth failed their Sign In. We got a warning. That’s what happens when your smartphone signal is interrupted when you’re waiting for approval. The detailed error log will fill up all the empty space, so it’s a huge pain.”

“Since it’s getting dark, it might be best to get to sleep.”

While they discussed that, Fighter Priest Armelina rested her metal staff Shining Weapon on her shoulder.

“But if she wants to disarm us, wouldn’t it be faster to take these from us?”

“The Shining Weapons are like our lifelines, so no one would agree to that. Negotiations are about finding a compromise. Either way, we can’t use our Command-style Magic without the Parameter-style to go with it. We’re unarmed and about the same as normal humans, so we need to be careful.”

“That’s why I’m glad we have this mass of pure physical strength so close by. We’re up against a Break News and we might not actually be able to defeat her, but we might get enough of an opening to escape.”

And as they said that, the White Witch in the insane cow print bikini shook the cowbell around her neck while rubbing up against Boo Boo’s giant body.

“Yes, we need Boo Boo to protect us right now. Yes! We finally have a realistic shot at the ideal situation for a healer, which is how it should have been in the first place!!”

“Ah! Wait, cow!! Don’t cling to Boo Boo dressed like that!!”

Meanwhile, Boo Boo tilted his head on the bridge as if he did not understand his situation here.

“Boo?”

“A perfect meat shield. A one-man vanguard. And I remain unharmed even if I’m only a burden. Everything about it is perfect! It’s like a dream! I will leave everything to you, Boo Boo!!”

“I said get away from Boo Boo!!”

In her fancy dress-like white swimsuit, Armelina listened to the cowbell and calmly observed the situation.

The White Witch was clinging to the Iberian Orc and shaking her head back and forth, but Armelina figured she was tripping a bit after experiencing the intense bestial from so close.

“I don’t like fighting, but I’ll do what I can to protect all of you from fights. Humans don’t have fur and your skin is soft, so be careful.”

“That’s right, that’s right! You don’t need a berserker that only thinks about attacking for your vanguard! I wanted someone who would focus on defense!! Kyah! Boo Boo, you’re just perfect☆”

“ ... ”

“And you can keep giving me more of the rare Mixing materials that all the supposedly intellectual old men in the inn town said were impossible to cultivate. I just...I have no words! I just have to stay by your side and I don’t have to worry about battles or procuring materials! It’s a dream come true!!”

“
..... ”

She’s definitely going to make yakiniku, mincemeat, or a roast out of those things, thought Armelina with a distant look in her eyes. *If the bridge breaks, I can jump to a nearby tree, but what happens if the entire mangrove is set on fire?*

Half worried and half excited, she once more turned toward Beatrice.

Holy Swordswoman Beatrice was biting her lip and trembling.

But what happened next was truly unexpected.

“Sniff...hic...”

It was Armelina in the audience who noticed first.

“She’s crying!? She wilted instead of exploding!?”



“Boo? What is it, Beatrice? Does your stomach hurt?”

She must not have wanted the 4 meter Orc to see her cry because Beatrice covered her face with her hands and curled up. But instead of reducing the confusion, she shouted back an incomplete answer.

“It’s your fault, Boo Boo!!”

“Squeal!? Beatrice, I don’t want to see you cry. If I did anything wrong, I’ll fix it, so tell me what it is!”

“It’s because...! It’s because you...!!”

She was trying to say that he had Cow Bikini Filinion clinging to him in ecstasy (over finding the kind of position she had always wanted), but since that would mean she had lost control of her emotions, her pride would not allow her to say so. If she had used her frames and lines to put the information in order, it might have destroyed her mentally.

Armeline commented in a daze.

“Y’know, I could have sworn we were on an almost certainly deadly mission to visit a Break News while unarmed...”

The image around her was mostly chaos.

After pointing back and forth between Boo Boo and Filinion’s faces, hitting dense Boo Boo’s calf with a low kick, and sobbing, the representative member of the level cap adventurers ultimately found herself on Boo Boo’s back.

No, instead of riding on his back, she rode on his shoulders while using his giant pig head as a cushion. After all, his back was too big to wrap her legs around!

Her level of intelligence was the same as Suttriona's.

After calming down a fair bit, Filinion asked another question.

"Um, is there some kind of rule saying any crying girl in Grandnir is sucked in toward Boo Boo's head? So is that eventually going to happen to us too?"

Beatrice was in a fairly dangerous position (and she realized using his head like a round cushion pressed various parts of her body against him and rested her breasts on top of his head), but she ignored how her own head nearly hit the occasional tunnel of trees as she pointed down at Filinion and Armelina on the ground.

"New rule! No clinging to Boo Boo when you have more than 50% of your skin exposed. Got that!?"

"Eh!? Why am I part of this too!?"

"Boo Boo, no cheating on me! And I mean that in every way!!"

"I don't even know what cheating on you means, so what am I supposed to do?"

"You don't need to know that!! Wahhhh!!"

"Beatrice, I feel like you were more mature before. You weren't such a crybaby."

Boo Boo walked onward while tilting his head.

As Filinion and Armelina followed in their swimsuits, they finally spoke up.

"I feel like I'm getting worn out faster than usual."

“Oh, your physical strength has probably dropped without the Percentage-type reinforcing it. Think about it. You wouldn’t normally go on a trip in sandals or mules, would you?”

“I’m still not letting you ride on Boo Boo! I’ll never allow it!!”

No one was hoping for that, but she still drove the point home.

“?”

The tunnel of trees overhead began to shake up ahead.

Some small figures were dropping down. They were half as tall as a human, looked like bipedal dogs and cats, and could clearly speak.

It was the Cat Sith cat fairies and the Cu Sith dog fairies.

The kitties were dressed as maids and the puppies were dressed as butlers.

They were barking and meowing while skillfully rolling across the white bridge, but they were clearly grappling with each other. Plus, they were not unarmed. The blades were only sharp shards of Diamond Salt attached to sticks, but the Cat Sith had spears and the Cu Sith had axes.

They had not been refined, but that would only make the wound and pain last longer.

“We must settle this! You underhanded cowards held off on your donations to give yourselves a better future. Did you think you immoral lot had any hope of victory here!?”

“Nonsense. The burden of our offerings to the Break News was 50/50? You forced that onto us without even thinking about our comparative situations, but when we ignore that, you think you have the right to attack us? Don’t

make me laugh. We have no reason to compromise and we will teach you first-hand what it is you properly deserve!”

Boo Boo and the others did not have time to call out to them.

As the small and round group jumped to the trees and scrambled up to the higher bridges, the sounds of the struggle faded into the distance.

But something did remain.

There were red drips visible here and there on the white bridge over the ocean.

“This has gone beyond a joke. The Cat Sith and Cu Sith have slowly lost control and gone beyond a simple skirmish.”

“Boo. Should we chase after them to stop them?”

“If we tried to stop every little fight, we would never see the end of it. And if we climbed up into the branches, they would probably break. Not to mention that they’d start up again when we weren’t looking even if we did stop them. If we’re really going to stop this, we need to cut off the source of their fear and confusion.”

Boo Boo looked worriedly into the forest and then started walking toward their destination once more.

They were on their way to Kallikantzaros, the Vampire who controlled lunar eclipses.

Part 5

The moon shined brightly on the beach.

They were on a point of land that stuck out of Grandnir’s southern forest. The seawater covering the mangrove seemed to avoid this beach in a Y-

shape. Fine white sand covered the coast and a giant wooden ship had run aground like a beached whale. The ghost ship had been abandoned for so long that it was damaged and falling apart. The words Next Voyager had just about faded from the side of the ship.

“I hear that’s the last remnant of a project meant to find other land beyond the ocean,” said Cow Print Bikini White Witch Filinion as she looked up at the ship.

They had thrown out the Lantern Plant after arriving at the beach. No matter what happened, giving away their position by carrying a light was not the best plan.

“That was before it had been medically proven that the slight differences in Grandnir’s rotation, gravity, and atmosphere cause definite changes to the mind and body of anyone who stays here for long periods. The 2000 people who recklessly built the ship and set sail vanished, but the empty ship returned to the beach.”

“I see. That’s the perfect history for a Vampire’s base.”

Armeline forced a challenging tone into her voice while wearing her fancy dress swimsuit.

Boo Boo looked worried as he stared up at the rotted black shape. Was that due to the Break News there, or due to the ghost story?

It was supposedly a sea research vessel, but it looked like a clipper with a giant sail. Or perhaps like a cruise ship from an older age. That was because it had been loaded with plenty of entertainment facilities to maintain the mental health of the 2000 people living on it long term. From their outside perspective, they could see what looked like parasols sticking up from the

deck. The rotted ship could no longer sail out to sea, so it had become a haunted mansion large enough to easily host a dance party.

“Now, then.”

After finally calming down, Beatrice descended from Boo Boo in her red bikini with fluffy lace. She rubbed her still-red nose and opened her mouth.

“Where do we go in? Well, if we have to climb the wall, I guess we can do that.”

“You can make freakish muscleman comments if you want, but don’t forget that we have no equipment and thus no Parameter support. You don’t want to act all smug and then fall on your ass, do you?”

After checking around, they found a boarding gangway lowered on one side. The ship’s master had not prepared it specifically for them because it seemed to have been abandoned there with the ship. It was rotting away and it seemed to have trouble under Boo Boo’s weight, but he fortunately did not break through.

They found a large pool on the deck. It even had water in it. Any smaller filth likely did not stand out in the moonlight, but it was much cleaner than Beatrice and the others had expected.

“Where is Kallikantzaros herself?”

“Ugh. 2000 people is more than a high-rise resort hotel, right? How many days would it take to check through every last one of those rooms? And we might find a Break News around any corner. Isn’t this more deadly than your average Labyrinth visit?”

But as they discussed that, the ground suddenly shook. No, the ship did.

“Wha-? Wah! Wait!?”

“Kyah!! Th-there’s nothing to hold onto!!”

The pool water tilted and flowed out like a flood. Holy Swordswoman Beatrice, White Witch Filinion, and Fighter Priest Armelina rolled down the sharply sloped deck and were dumped right into the pool. Only Boo Boo remained standing thanks to his powerful legs.

“Cough! Uhp!!”

Beatrice frantically got her head above water only to have another large wave hit her in the face.

The giant ship shook again and tilted back to its original angle.

“Was that supposed to throw us into the pool?”

“Not good. This is grabbing at our legs to slow us down!!”

Beatrice and the other two had changed into swimsuits, so they had none of the Parameter support of their clothes-shaped Magic. They were no different from the normal people walking between the gray buildings back on earth. And now they were caught in the water. They would be in real trouble if Kallikantzaros specialized in projectiles like arrows or javelins. Even if they tried to dodge, they could not escape being hit.

They naturally looked up toward the mast and lookout stand near the top, but...

“Do not fear, children of man. Your blood is not to my liking.”

They were frozen in place by a girl’s voice that rang like a small bell.

It came from right next to Boo Boo.

Boo Boo seemed unable to move.

Even he could not move a finger and that told Beatrice just how abnormal this was.

The ship's master had appeared at some point.

But how?

She was indeed one of the Break News. The previous atmosphere was entirely uprooted by her appearance and all of the rules were rewritten with her in the center. It felt like they could no longer trust what had worked just fine in the past. It was like the most basic definitions had been rewritten by this overwhelming presence.

The girl appeared crimson in the darkness. Despite being on a beachside cruise ship, she wore what amounted to a thin red negligee. A black bikini showed through below that. Green and white fluffs were attached at points and she wore a pointed night cap, so it looked a lot like a Santa Claus outfit with a skirt. She had long reddish-blond hair and the ends curled inwards, so its great volume looked like a wide spread triangle. The bangs were cut in a perfectly straight line and she looked to be more than a head shorter than Beatrice.

But after meeting Fairy Queen Suttriona, they knew they could not rely on her appearance.

In fact...

(She reminds me a lot of Suttriona. Is there some kind of connection between them???)

But there was one major difference with this girl whose gloved fingertips toyed with a stuffed piglet doll.

Her breasts alone were quite large.

“(Uuh!? I lose to her...?)”

“(Not that winning would make me exactly happy.)”

“(I wasn’t even looking for a competition! Dammit!!)”

The girls in the water each had their own reaction.

Meanwhile, the 4 meter Orc spoke even though he still could not turn around.

“Squeal... We are here to speak with you.”

“I do not mind. It would seem the humans actually followed the dress code and I am not so short-tempered that I would throw out guests who made a point of being respectful and polite. Besides, I would never have allowed you onboard otherwise. As the Vampire who controls lunar eclipses, I could use the moon’s gravitational pull to bring an extraordinarily large wave to cover all of Grandnir or I could cover the land with a giant swarm of crabs or insects.”

That may have been why Kallikantzaros used the rotted ship as her fortress. If she went all out, the entire island would be wiped off the map. Everything but the buoyant ship would be washed away and sink to the bottom of the ocean, so she had chosen to remain on the inconvenient-looking grounded ship.

That was the scale at which the Break News thought.

The gorgeous Vampire laughed and whispered to them.

“But it has been awhile since I saw such a powerful life force. It almost feels nostalgic.”

“?”

“I said human blood is not to my liking, did I not? I felt faint when I heard the entire Iberian Orc village had been wiped out. You see, I am a Vampire that can only create subordinates from them. It might not be much, but I am very fortunate to find this proper bloodline.”

“!!!!!! Boo Boo, run away!!”

Red Bikini Beatrice frantically yelled up at him, but she could not use a single Command-style Magic right now. The pool water seemed to grab at her, so she could not even climb up onto the deck.

But surprisingly, Kallikantzaros did not do anything more.

She did not sink her fangs into or even lay a finger on Boo Boo. Instead, she simply gave them a bewitching smile.

“Do not worry. I will not devour him right away. This might be the very last one and I do not want to be the one that drives them extinct. My lifespan is long, so the wise choice would be to wait a century or two and resume hunting once their numbers have recovered.”

No matter what happened, she was not friendly and this place was not safe.

This was a much purer threat than the Thousand Dragon or Sutriona.

“There is no need to be so tense, humans.” The Vampire’s voice was calm.

“In fact, the current situation is on your side. You are essentially hiding behind the most effective hostage you could hope for. So relax and tell me what it is you want.”

“ ... ”

She was treating Boo Boo like a frail hostage.

That alone was enough for Beatrice to feel faint.

Meanwhile, Kallikantzaros was arrogance itself. She ignored the specimen of a nearly extinct species and walked to one of the parasols on the deck.

She threw herself onto a beach chair, placed the piglet doll on her stomach, and crossed her legs.

“But, humans, you must remain in the pool as you relax. If you climb onto the deck before I leave, I will see it as a hostile act and launch a merciless attack.”

“?”

Holy Swordswoman Beatrice could not see the logic of that request, so she gave voice to her confusion.

“Because your specialty fields are gravitational manipulation and water?”

“It is simpler than that.”

Kallikantzaros narrowed her eyes a little as she lay in the beach chair while wearing nightwear.

Her eyes alone were not smiling.

“I will not underestimate humans. I am aware you have a long history of thinking up means of killing and destroying ‘beings much like us’. Most of it is nonsense, but there are some truly troublesome methods mixed in. So the best way to handle humans is to keep them from moving and remove every card in their hand.”

Was she referring to vampire hunters?

It was unclear how much truth there was to any of that, but it had yet to be proven that the vampires spoken of by those supposed hunters were the

same as this race in Grandnir. Beatrice would not expect to see any change to Kallikantzaros if someone held garlic up to her.

“Boo.”

Then Boo Boo spoke while looking at his natural predator.

“I don’t get all this complicated stuff, but are you saying you’ll hear us out?”

“I will allow you to speak. So out with it.”

“Okay.”

Boo Boo nodded once and began his explanation.

He explained how her power to control lunar eclipses was messing with the emotions of the Cat Sith and Cu Sith and how that was causing them problems.

He explained how they had created an altar to her and that they had tried to calm her by taking turns making offerings, but the burden of those offerings had led to conflict.

He explained how the conflict had gone beyond mere fights and there was a fear it would pass the point of no return before long.

“Hmm.”

After listening to it all, Kallikantzaros tilted her head like it was none of her concern.

Boo Boo shook his hands.

"If you reduce the amount of meat and vegetables, the Cat Sith and Cu Sith won't have so much trouble preparing it all and they shouldn't be quite so on edge. Can't you do something?"

"Or you could just stop manipulating the moon's gravitational pull so much..." added Beatrice from the center of the full moon's reflection in the water.

But...

"I don't know anything about that."

"Hm?"

"I have never heard of this altar the Cat Sith and Cu Sith have supposedly constructed."

"What!? W-wait a second. Then why are the puppies and kitties fighting!?"

Fighter Priest Armelina could not restrain herself, but the red Vampire waved a hand in annoyance.

"I understand why they might want to make requests to a paradox with a soul, but isn't it terribly conceited to think you can have 100% control over me, humans?"

"..."

"I have no idea how many shrines and altars there are to worship or request things of me. I have no interest in it and I am not obligated to listen. I reject all offerings and prayers on general principle. So I am not involved in this conflict between the Cat Sith and Cu Sith."

Cow Print Bikini White Witch Filinon and Fancy White Dress Swimsuit Fighter Priest Armelina exchanged a glance in the moonlit pool.

“Are you saying what I think you’re saying? The Cat Sith and Cu Sith only think they’re offering these things to a Break News?”

“This could be bad if that altar is inside the forest. Birds and wild animals might be stealing all of the offerings.”

In her beach chair, Kallikantzaros did not seem moved to positive or negative emotion.

She was truly not interested.

“But if you speak to them, I think those cats and dogs will stop fighting.”

“Why would I do that?”

“Because you’re causing all of this in the first place!”

Red Bikini Beatrice looked like she had a light headache, but the Vampire was entirely unfazed.

“Then you tell them I will not change to suit their needs. Tell them they must change to suit my needs. I am a paradox, so I have no room for logical arguments. Besides, I expect they are only blaming the moon for all of their negative emotions.”

They were at an impasse.

Kallikantzaros had no interest in some creatures she had never met. And to a Break News who lived alone on a ghost ship, the category of strangers was a large one. Even when she had discussed the destruction of Boo Boo’s village, she had not shown any actual emotion.

But as Beatrice thought about that, things took an unexpected turn.

“And I am making this choice for your sakes.”

“Boo?”

“Look to the sky and you will understand. The winds have changed. A Break News besides me has been wandering around lately, but perhaps that is due to the battle between the Cat Sith and Cu Sith. If so, one of them other than me will likely intervene soon. If I join in now, we will have a fight between paradoxes on our hands. Does an endless desert or an ice age frighten you more? Those would be the choices in that battle, human.”

Even in the pool, Holy Swordswoman Beatrice definitely felt her pores opening and sweat seeping out.

This was bad. Every single one of the Break News was extraordinary and unmatched, but a clash between more than one would go beyond unpredictable. The inn town could be destroyed and the exploration of the Labyrinth could be severely delayed. In fact, Grandnir itself could sink to the bottom of the ocean.

Then the cow print bikini White Witch hesitantly spoke up with a more optimistic opinion.

“Which Break News is it? Oh, could it be Miss Sutriona?”

But that hope was dashed.

A paradox with a soul would never be on their side.

“No, it is another. Didn’t I say you would understand if you looked to the sky?”

Part 6

Meanwhile, Fairy Queen Sutriona stood in a position more than 2000 meters removed from the Next Voyager washed up on the dark beach.

However, this distance was not one that could be measured on the map.

She was in the moonlit sky.

“Hmm, it would seem I won’t be needed.”

The girl with long silver hair and a black ribbon dress held a collapsible telescope. She used it like a pirate from an older era, but she had of course bought it while pretending to be human in the inn town.

The palm-sized Fairy named Meridiana was flying nearby.

“What happened to Boo Boo and the others? Are they really all right?”

“I said I won’t be needed.”

There were a few different reasons she had not gone with Boo Boo’s group. For example, if they were all in one place, no one would be left to rescue them if Kallikantzaros made a surprise attack, so they could be wiped out all at once.

“But why are you sneaking around? Did you actually want to go with them, Lady Sutriona?”

“Hmph. I don’t mind helping them out, but I can’t have them assuming I will. Human souls are easily corrupted, so they would quickly grow dependent on me and stop making an effort. Only helping when they truly need it is best.”

“Fwehh. You really do care about Boo Boo, don’t you? You’ve given this a lot of thought.”

“Try not to say anything unnecessary.”

That was another of her reasons.

“...But the more fundamental reason is that I just don’t want to see her.”

“You mean Kallikantzaros? You do look a lot like.”

“I hate how everyone makes assumptions based on that. She’s nothing more than a neighborhood childhood friend, but she insists on acting all full of herself. And don’t let those giant breasts fool you; I am the older one.”

As they discussed that, a shadow appeared in the moonlight.

The two of them looked even further into the heavens to see a giant cloud covering the full moon. But this was no normal meteorological condition. It should have been a perfectly cloudless night, so there was a reason these thick clouds were ignoring that assumption. Now, what being in Grandnir could call in rainclouds?

“L-L-Lady Sutriona...”

Meridiana the Fairy grew pale and her voice trembled.

She felt fear and agitation with a distinct spice of hatred and disgust.

That was hardly surprising when she had once had her life directly targeted by this Break News.

But Sutriona was unfazed.

She put her hands on her skinny hips and snorted from her nose.

“I see. So that’s what’s going on.”

“?”

The silver-haired girl looked a little perplexed as she looked up at the thick clouds.

“This is a path we all must travel, but it is an exceedingly meaningless one, my weakest fellow paradox.”

Part 7

Kallikantzaros had said the clouds were changing.

Boo Boo and the others disembarked from the grounded ship. Holy Swordswoman Beatrice, White Witch Filinion, and Fighter Priest Armelina all grabbed their Shining Weapons and regained their Percentage-type Magic which formed their clothes. Those level cap adventurers had regained their level cap strength.

That was the human power that even an overwhelming paradox had made sure not to underestimate.

They too were beginning to notice the change. It was obvious once they looked up into the night sky.

“The Thousand Dragon!?” shouted the Holy Swordswoman.

That ruler of flying dragons measured more than 1000 meters long. When that Break News simply cut through the air, it would create enough of an air pressure difference to produce immense rain clouds.

Flying at low altitude was enough to bring disaster.

An incredible wind swept across the entire area with enough force to knock over the mangrove trees.

On the dark beach, the unathletic glasses girl held her hat on with one hand and asked a question while already out of breath.

“Hyah!! B-but why is it back now? I don’t understand why it would interfere in the Cat Sith and Cu Sith’s problem!!”

They moved from the beach to the forest. As they ran along the white bridges that branched out all over, the mangrove was buzzing with energy like a shaken beehive. The tiny residents had their hands full dodging the thick branches that broke off and fell. Small pots and lamps were falling from overhead, but that may have been them quickly gathering their possessions from their white cube houses. On the upper level bridges, bipedal dogs and cats were also going around dropping down handmade weapons, hitting their heads on nearby branches, and either falling onto the white salt bridges or doggy paddling across the ocean surface.

When Beatrice picked up a Cat Sith in a maid uniform that was sitting dizzily on the bridge and asked what was going on, the cat fairy shook its head and answered.

“You have to ask!? It’s back. The Thousand Dragon is back. It said it didn’t like that we had built an altar to someone else while it was away. And it won’t be satisfied until we make an even nicer altar as an offering!”

“ ... ”

The three adventurers looked puzzled and a passing Cu Sith in a butler uniform called out to them.

“What are you doing!? You need to get out of here!”

An earthquake-like tremor passed through the ground and pillars of water made them all tremble.

The Break News had apparently made a lazy U-turn and then landed on the coast instead of in the forest.

“We’ve heard all about the Thousand Dragon. And if it’s landed, it must need something on the surface. And that means a feast! This monstrous

paradox enjoys the intoxication of devouring the Fairies which are so much like us...!!”

Frantic barking and mewling filled the forest.

It was absolute pandemonium, but Boo Boo and Beatrice had trouble understanding this. The Holy Swordswoman reached toward one of the bright red hibiscus-like flowers growing directly from the trunks of the nearby trees.

“Crimson Heaven Flowers. They’ve been starving due to the offerings, but they don’t seem to be eating these.”

“Boo. They make my tongue tingle, so I normally avoid them.”

“But the Thousand Dragon’s intoxication came from the dramatic change produced when the Crimson Heaven Flower’s weak toxin is mixed with Fairy blood.”

“Yes, but.” Guidebook obsessed Filinion hesitantly spoke up. “There are Fairies, cat fairies, and dog fairies. It’s easy to view them all the same, but they’re actually completely different. Even if the Cat Sith and Cu Sith ate the Crimson Heaven Flowers, it wouldn’t cause any kind of change inside them. In fact, since they can’t break it down and accumulate it, I think they would end up as woozy as anyone else.”

“You mean the Thousand Dragon has no direct reason to attack the Cat Sith and Cu Sith?”

“Boo,” groaned the 4-meter Iberian Orc. “Regardless, I made a promise with the Thousand Dragon. I said I would be keeping an eye on it and that I wouldn’t let it kill except to live or to eat. I doubt it would be doing the same thing again.”

Then what was happening?

They found a hint in the fleeing cat fairies and dog fairies.

“This changes everything! We can’t worry about Kallikantzaros now!!”

“Oh,” said Beatrice without thinking.

She looked up at the thick clouds covering the heavens.

“Don’t tell me...!!”

“Is it trying to reset the problem by giving them something to fear even more than the Vampire? Is it using an even greater fear to end the conflict between the Cat Sith and Cu Sith?”

“Well, I suppose all war on earth *would* end if an army of aliens attacked while riding a giant meteorite, but why would the Thousand Dragon do that? I don’t see why it would want to play the bad guy like this!”

If the Thousand Dragon had enough of a connection to them for this, the cat fairies and dog fairies would not be panicking. If they knew each other, the Break News would try to contact them instead.

But that had not happened.

The Thousand Dragon was trying to solve this problem despite having no connection to them.

And it was putting itself at risk to do so.

“...”

Boo Boo alone fell silent.

He stared silently up at the dark and heavy night sky.

At the dark clouds.

At the rainclouds that a certain being had intentionally created.

Part 8

“Have you ever heard of someone wishing they could be a hero or protect someone?”

Sutriona sounded exasperated as she floated in the night sky. Palm-sized Fairy Meridiana seemed to have trouble picturing what she meant.

“This isn’t about what that dragon gains or if I know them. It wants to save someone and it doesn’t care who. It wants to be that sort of person. No desire could be more juvenile.”

“You mean *the* Thousand Dragon feels that way? To be honest, I don’t really understand. That doesn’t change the fact that that evil dragon ate us Fairies for fun and pleasure.”

“You’re right about that.”

But Sutriona’s mood remained unchanged.

“In fact, *that’s exactly what makes it so easy* to fall into that heroic desire.”

“?”

“That kind of heroic desire doesn’t put much focus on whether you actually end up saving whoever it is or not. I mean, it’s hard to feel the weight of a stranger’s life. So when your heart is yearning to protect someone, there has to be some other reason, right?”

The exasperated Fairy Queen saw through it all.

Almost like she was bitterly recalling when she had gone down the same path.

"It's just like habitual wrist cutting. You feel a weight, you feel guilty, you feel inferior, and you want to rid yourself of that suffering, but you're afraid of having others mercilessly criticize you. So you harm yourself. *You harm yourself to feel relief. You tell yourself that you've clearly been punished enough if you're suffering so much.*"

"But..." Meridiana's face clouded over. "That's completely selfish. It doesn't give any thought to how we feel. That dragon only wants to free itself, so it's just showing off some misguided self-punishment. In fact, it sounds like it's building up an invisible wall to rob us of the right to criticize it."

"Exactly. No matter how much it hurts itself, this won't lead to absolving it of its crimes. And it's laughable that it thinks it can make itself the victim. How misguided can you get?"

Even after saying all that, the silver-haired girl laughed.

"You understand all that, don't you? You understand, but you still do it. Weakest, that's what this is, isn't it?"

It was something Sutriona herself had done.

To protect Beatrice from the Guild named Elkiad, Boo Boo had made an enemy of every last human in the inn town. And to erase the negative emotions focused on him, she had sent in an even greater threat.

But Sutriona had the Fairies.

Her situation had not been the same as the Thousand Dragon's current self-destructive thought process.

"..."

For one thing, the Thousand Dragon was not in a normal state of mind.

It had periodically attacked the Fairies for the powerful toxin in their blood, so the sudden end to that had to have caused a psychological change. This was like dangerous withdrawal symptoms. As the dragon suffered from various pains and hallucinations, it had clenched its teeth and stuck to its decision to not devour the Fairies any longer. And as the internal pressure had grown and grown, it had finally erupted out in a different form. That had likely led to this heroic desire to protect. And it was all a product of the dragon's decision to not lay a claw on the Fairies even if it meant tearing itself to shreds.

The dragon was not asking for understanding.

It was not showing off to strangers.

So as long as even one person understood this secret struggle, that was enough.

"And that is why it will not stop. This isn't about how many people it must save. It probably isn't even aware of it, but the real focus is on how much it itself has been harmed. It can never rid itself of its guilt, so each time that guilt rises back to the surface, it will wear its body down to save everything around it. This is a lonely battle that no one asked for and will not even quench its own desire."

Part 9

I hated myself.

I hated how I made everyone hate me.

I was so big and had so much strength, but I couldn't protect anything. No matter what I did, I would hurt someone. I would destroy everything around me.

I hated all of that.

And I thought about quitting.

No matter how hard I tried, I could never reach any kind of results.

I ate the tiny Fairies and indulged in the temporary intoxication and pleasure that followed. After it was over, the disgust and despair would be so great I just wanted to die. But the next thing I knew, my life would feel empty and I would find myself searching out Fairies once more.

I did awful things. I wanted to apologize. But I didn't have the right.

So I was honestly happy when that Iberian Orc stopped me. I'm called a Break News and everyone fears me, but he tackled me and stopped me. I really did shed tears when I learned there was someone like that in Grandnir. I just wish that Iberian Orc had not been so perfect. If he had given into his anger and finished me off, nothing would have remained. That would have been the happiest ending of all.

Instead, I'm left with this guilt filling my stomach like lead.

While I writhed in agony from a sensation like all of my blood vessels and nerves were swelling from my body, I had to find something I could do.

There isn't much I can do.

Even as big and strong as I am, I can't bring those Fairies back to life.

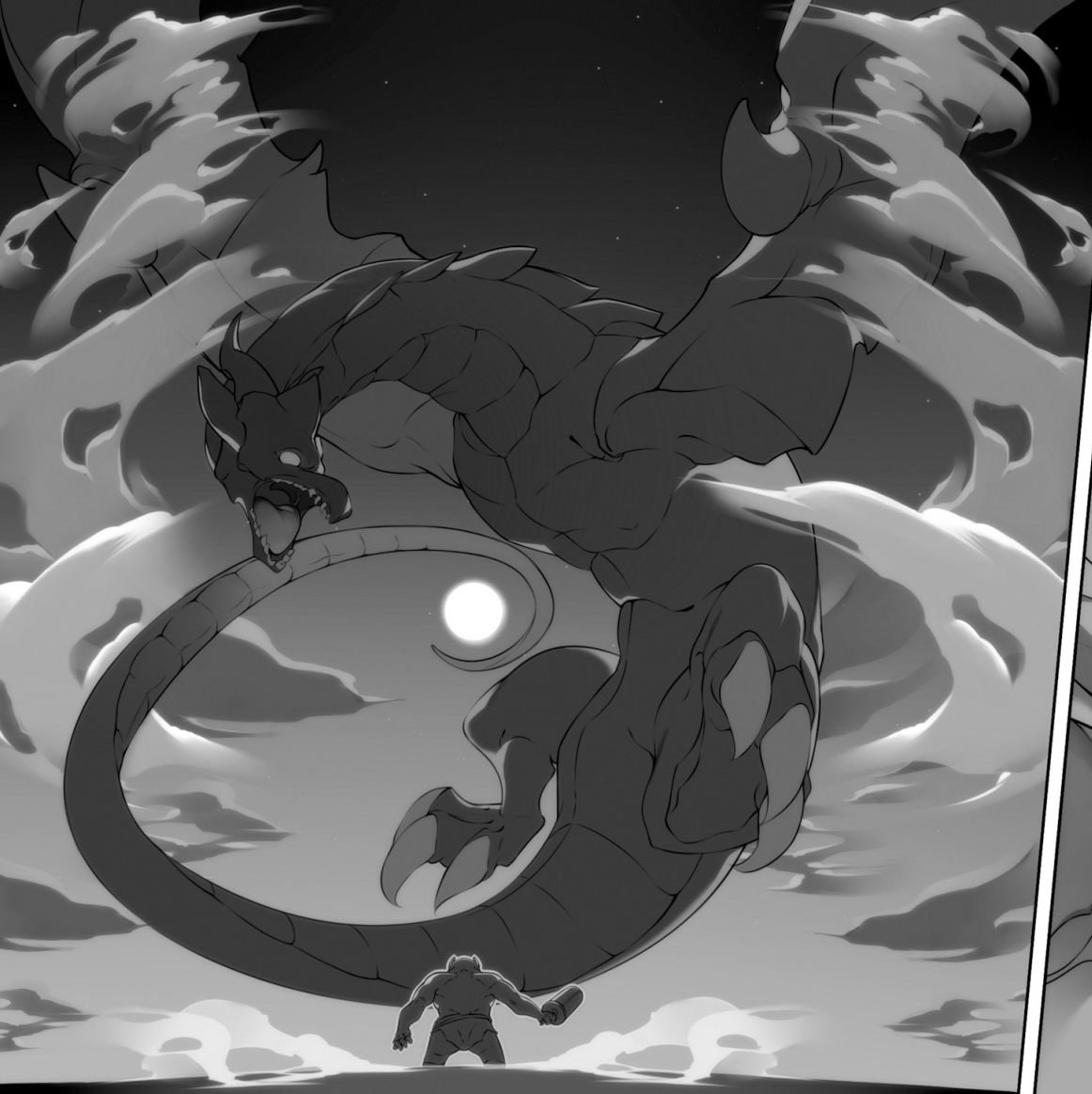
So after devouring so many of them, I at least want to save as many of those Fairies as I can. It can be 5 times as many or 10 times as many, but it has to be a lot. That won't cool anyone's anger and it won't bring back the lives lost, but I can't see any reason for me to be here if I don't do that. It's the

only way I can excuse the fact that I survived. They might call this misguided, tell me it's useless, and throw stones, but I will not back down on this.

I will wear down my body.

And in so doing, I will save them.

It was my inability to shake off my weakness and softness that led to so many Fairies being sacrificed. It was because I showed no pity or mercy. So my path of atonement must be the same. It must be brutal through and through. I must be bloodily worn down by every step and yet know I will never find forgiveness. That is the only correct way to spend the remainder of this life I was left with by mistake.



That was what I thought.

I truly believed that.

And yet...

A figure stood in the wicked dragon's way.

Just like that time, the Iberian Orc raised a Shining Weapon that resembled a log or a steel beam.

"Boo Boo...!?"

Without thinking, I spoke in a voice outside a human's audible range.

That daring Iberian Orc did not take a single step back. The way we faced each other from the ocean and the beach was like a repeat of before. It was like he was going to correct some absolute mistake once more.

"I told you."

Just hearing his low voice felt like being sliced in two by a blade.

"I told you I would be keeping an eye on you. I said there was no avoiding it when it comes to living and eating. But I also told you not to take lives for any other reason."

"!!"

"So I'm here to keep my promise. If you aren't treating someone's life with the proper care – even if it's your own life – I won't forgive you."

I tried to argue back, but I couldn't find the words.

I only felt a stinging sensation.

It filled my chest.

In the face of his overwhelming righteousness, my *pretend* self-sacrifice was entirely meaningless. I wouldn't be able to truly save the Cat Sith and Cu Sith. I felt like he had just revealed the pathetic side of myself I had hidden in the mud.

But I couldn't let it get to me.

I couldn't just accept Boo Boo's righteousness and kindness.

I mean, how could I live a proper life? How could I possibly make up for everything I had done and then live in the light of the sun? So I needed to be punished. Thoroughly punished. That was the hesitant and lowly sort of heart I had.

But I found something even I could do.

I finally ran across it.

So I won't lose. No matter who I'm up against.

I simply can't lose.

Part 10

There was no starting signal.

It happened in an instant.

A truly deafening roar silenced even the Cat Sith maids and Cu Sith butlers as they ran around mewling and barking.

Boo Boo wielded his thick Shining Weapon that resembled a log or a steel beam and the Thousand Dragon was a giant dragon measuring over 1000 meters long. The two of them clashed head-on.

The trees of the forest were knocked over as Boo Boo and the ruler of flying dragons rolled along and moved the battlefield. They seemed to move in a giant ring, first from the beach to the southern forest and then from the mangrove to the beach and into the ocean. Even the giant leeches, bats, and other blood-sucking animals fled.

“H-hey. Is that gonna be okay?”

Fighter Priest Armelina was taken aback. Boo Boo was singlehandedly fighting the colossal dragon that was the most obvious example of a Break News. The situation could hardly have been more dangerous, but the thought of helping made her legs tremble. She may have been at the level cap and thus one of the strongest humans, but that fierce attack was like an environmental change.

She had heard stories, but seeing it for herself was something else entirely.

White Witch Filinion also had a faint tremor in her voice.

“B-but he defeated the Thousand Dragon once before to save Meridiana, right? I-if we already know which one is more powerful...”

“...I’m not so sure.”

Because she cared so much about Boo Boo, Beatrice did not let herself cling to that optimistic view. And she had an actual reason for her answer.

“The Thousand Dragon learned the bitter taste of defeat in that battle. Before, it thought it could always force its way to victory with brute strength alone, but now it’s learned there are some battles it can’t win

without being a little cleverer. And now it is standing before Boo Boo again. Instead of running away, it wants to overcome this obstacle...or break through it."

"Wait, you mean...?"

"The Thousand Dragon's most important trait is its giant body and the extraordinary strength that allows it to move that great mass around. But to be honest, it's hard to say Boo Boo gained full supremacy over that giant dragon. It's 1000 meters long. If it puts its mind to it, it can use that for some frightening strategies instead of just brute strength."

Part 11

Fairy Queen Sutriona and Meridiana observed from the night sky.

The palm-sized Fairy was clearly worried as she watched Boo Boo and the Thousand Dragon produce great blasts of sand while just barely far enough away to not interfere with the grounded ship used by the lunar eclipse controlling Vampire.

"L-Lady Sutriona! Can't you help Boo Boo with your power!?"

"Are you sure you want two Break News colliding head-on? And if I was going to do that, this is a bad location. If I didn't guide it further out to sea, we could easily blow away half the island. And I doubt that dragon will be so easily lured at the moment."

Meanwhile, there was movement on the surface.

In a straight fight, Boo Boo had the advantage despite being so much smaller. Unlike a venomous insect attacking a human, he would win through pure physical strength. It was just like a bullet a few millimeters across opening a hole in a human's forehead. Boo Boo's athleticism had

arrived at a level beyond even extraordinary, but the Thousand Dragon was well aware of that after its previous loss. And yet it was challenging the Iberian Orc. That meant it knew some way of overturning that assumption.

The colossal dragon roared.

Jaws large enough to break through a small reef approached Boo Boo from the heavens. The beach seemed to be under attack by a plesiosaur. But it did not reach the Iberian Orc. He jumped up with frightening leg strength and planted his feet on the Thousand Dragon's approaching head.

"Ah!" shouted Meridiana.

In the last battle, Boo Boo had climbed onto the dragon's head and jabbed his Shining Weapon into its skull to declare victory.

But the palm-sized Fairy had not raised her voice because she was certain of Boo Boo's victory.

It happened a moment later.

The Thousand Dragon immediately leaped backwards as if performing a backflip.

To reiterate, this dragon was over 1000 meters long.

So by placing someone in its mouth and extending its body vertically, it could lift them 1000 meters into the air. It would take less than a second and the pressure difference was not addressed. It had failed to hold Boo Boo in its mouth, but having him on its head was similar.

Just like swinging a bucket of water around in a circle, centrifugal force kept him from falling off.

The movement of such an overwhelming mass stirred up the night air.

“Kyah!?”

“Tch. It’s always something!!”

Sutriona used both hands to hold the palm-sized Fairy that was nearly blown away by the wind.

But it did not end there.

This was a backflip.

While upside down, the Thousand Dragon plunged headfirst into the seawater.

Meaning...

“This isn’t good... Does it plan to drag Boo Boo 1000 meters below the ocean!?”

An explosive roar answered her.

At a kilometer out at sea, an incredible crater of water spread out in every direction like an asteroid had hit.

Rotating down from an altitude of 1000 meters would bring them 1000 meters below the ocean. It was nothing more than a backflip for the Thousand Dragon, but it was very different for Boo Boo. Just under 4 meters seemed gigantic from a human perspective, but he was not as solid as a metal diving suit that pushed back all the effects of the water pressure.

And even if he could withstand the pressure, he was still 1000 meters underwater. If the Thousand Dragon let go of Boo Boo, he could not return to the surface on his own. His breath would not last. And even if his fierce muscular strength allowed him to clear that 1 kilometer depth in a short

period of time, then the risk of decompression sickness became a problem. The blood flowing through his veins could easily break apart.

He was truly cornered.

This was the master of floods who freely produced rainclouds and brought both the destruction and blessings of water to Grandnir.

And the watery cell that dragon had created had surrounded and swallowed up Boo Boo.

“Boo Boo!!” screamed Meridiana. “Noooooooooooooooooooo!!?”

It looked like an unimaginable quantity of seawater exploding upwards. The massive pillar of water parted to reveal the 1000-meter dragon, but there was no pig-faced Iberian Orc on its head.

The victor was alone.

There was no sign of Boo Boo who had been dragged into the dark depths.

Part 12

“No,” said the girl who had observed Boo Boo from closer than anyone. “It isn’t over yet.”

Part 13

A change occurred.

It came from the Thousand Dragon who had supposedly won.

Its far too giant head shook. And then its powerful jaws opened with a creaking noise. The dragon had not done this. A great power was prying its jaws open from within.

Who could do that?

The answer was obvious.

“I see.”

In a beach chair next to the kind of pool one would expect on a luxury cruise liner, the Vampire spoke lazily while petting the piglet doll lying on her stomach.

She was Kallikantzaros, the being who freely controlled lunar eclipses and ruled over the gravity of that entire satellite.

Instead of a tropical drink on the side table, she had a leaf container swollen out to the size of a conch. The container was made by gathering several herbs like a bagworm, so if it was hung from the eaves at night, the morning dew would collect inside, mix with the herbs, and produce a cold drink. That was a Grandnir specialty generally known as Dew Tea, but she preferred the sea breeze more than the morning dew.

“Due to the massive pressure differences created by the elevation and depth and due to the insufficient amount of oxygen in your lungs, you should not have had any way to escape, Boo Boo, but an excellent idea occurred to you.”

The arrangement of herbs she chose provided a flavor much like thick blood.

It was a necessary luxury for her since she could not sink her fangs into an Iberian Orc's neck.

And there was only one thing that Vampire would be worried about.

“Inside the Thousand Dragon's stomach. The one using the ocean's pressure as a weapon will not be crushed by it. The internal pressure will remain unchanged and a stomach that large will retain enough oxygen for

you to continue breathing. After all, your opponent is a 1000-meter dragon blessed with bones and muscles powerful enough to keep it from crushing itself under its own weight.”

This was an opportunity only afforded to those who continued forward without fear.

But could you really do that?

Could you really escape danger by choosing to jump down the dragon’s gullet? Even if it made logical sense, could you restrain your emotions...no, restrain your terrified soul enough to actually do it?

“And no matter how solid the dragon’s body is, it will be fragile to an attack from within. Boo Boo was powerful enough to push through from the outside. That impact was capable of ignoring those hard scales and muscles, so when it directly rattles the dragon’s organs, it must feel heavy indeed.”

As she watched, the Thousand Dragon wobbled to the side.

As soon as Boo Boo jumped down from that cave of a mouth, the colossal dragon’s consciousness slipped away and it collapsed onto its side in the ocean.

Part 14

Beatrice and the others could only watch it play out.

Even at the level cap, this was well beyond what they could intervene in.

“Does that...end it?”

“Not at all. The Thousand Dragon was only butting in. The Cat Sith and Cu Sith’s fight had to do with that Vampire named Kallikantzaros. She prefers

to stay uninvolved and doesn't seem interested in resolving this, so won't the fight resume once this storm passes?"

Those were Filinion and Armelina's arguments, but Beatrice saw things differently.

"I'm not so sure."

"?"

The other two looked confused at first, but then they seemed to catch on.

The dark mangrove had been badly damaged, with trees knocked over and the white Diamond Salt bridges broken, but the cat fairies and dog fairies were stirring here and there. However, what they were speaking about had changed.

"...Looks like it's finally over."

"Nine lives aren't nearly enough. That was way too close..."

"...Battles sure are scary."

"I thought being strong was cool, but I didn't realize how scary it makes you look..."

"...Who cares about the whole offerings thing. If the alternative is fighting, I'd rather be a little patient, compromise, and continue placing offerings on the altar with them."

And to top it all off...

"...Let's end this. We're done for if we turn into monsters like that..."

"...Let's end this. We're done for if we turn into monsters like that..."

Beatrice bit her lip like she was truly, truly struggling to hold something back.

She wanted to say that wasn't it. She wanted to say that wasn't it at all. Something might have been wrong and they may have chosen violence as their method, but both Boo Boo and the Thousand Dragon had been trying to help the Cat Sith and Cu Sith. But she could not say that. If their fear of strength faded, they would clearly reach for their weapons once more.

"...You idiot."

So that was all she said.

To make sure no one knew what she really meant, she could only force out that tiny fragment of a thought.

Part 15

Everyone hated him.

Everyone feared him.

That last survivor of the Iberian Orcs spoke quietly in the dark forest.

He and one other person were walking back to his home.

"I think I somewhat understand how the Thousand Dragon felt."

"Boo Boo?"

Beatrice gave him a puzzled look as she walked alongside him, so he continued.

"If I'm useful, people might rely on me. If I get them to say 'thank you', I might be able to stay here. Sometimes that's how I feel. Even though I know the more I try, the more I'll fail and just make everyone fear me."

“That isn’t true...”

“But you can’t try to force those words out of people. You can’t think you’re entitled to hear those words. You can’t force your feelings onto people. I understand that, so I don’t do it. I don’t just keep fighting on and on because I’m dying to hear someone say ‘thank you’.”

“...”

She could not say anything.

It would be easy to repeat again and again that he was wrong. But what Boo Boo carried inside was different. Beatrice herself had once been treated like a nuisance because she was too powerful and created an imbalance, but she was a target of awe and respect. Everyone listened to whatever she said and watched what she did. Her position was different from Boo Boo and the Thousand Dragon’s who had hatred and fear forced onto them over and over and were driven away without being given a chance to say anything. They had a strength that did not allow for argument. They had a power that pushed people away the more they used it. Beatrice had been “blessed with strength”, so she could not say she understood so easily.

“That’s why I stopped that dragon.”

He did not realize what he was saying.

Boo Boo was assuming that he would live a thankless life.

And he did not realize how sad that really was.

“The Thousand Dragon failed again, but this isn’t the end for it. It’ll stand back up eventually. And this time, I think it really will do what it can for everyone. So I’ll wait. I’ll wait and search for the part inside it that is saying ‘thank you’.”

“Right,” said Beatrice with a nod.

There was not much she could do.

At the moment, she could only think of one thing for her to say.

“Thank you, Boo Boo.”

Meridiana's Recipe!

Warm Bucket Ostrich Egg Dessert

Ingredients:

- Bucket Ostrich Egg: 1 egg
- Large Wrapper Leaves: 3 or 4 fresh and damp ones
- Water: Enough (Make sure you have plenty for putting out the fire!)
- Rock Salt: 1 Pinch
- Dried Grass, Kindling, Etc.: Enough

Instructions:

1. Wrap the Bucket Ostrich Egg in the large wrapper leaves.
2. Find a patch of soft and moist dirt and dig a hole. After putting the egg from Step 1 inside, cover it with about a Fairy's arm length of dirt. Grind up some rock salt, dissolve it in water, and dampen the dirt with the water.
3. Place the dried grass, kindling, etc. on top and start a fire.
4. Dance the delicious egg dance around the fire. (Note: Converted into human terms, this is 5-6 minutes.)
5. Put out the fire, pull the egg out from the dirt, and you're done!

To my little sister!

You can add a distinctive flavor by soaking various herbs in the water instead of using rock salt. Fairies tend to use the Crimson Heaven Flower for a nice tingly flavor, but avoid serving this variant to other species.

Also, you can use the leftover shell for a bath. Pour water into half the shell, add in some Milk Coconut or Molasses Plant, and it'll pretty up your skin!



Chapter 2: Alternate World Worshiping White Succubus

Part 1

“...Sigh.”

There was a soft feminine sigh.

Even a complete amateur could detect the difference in the extremely high quality incense hanging in the air. The building had been built by the skilled hands of the rare carpenters who specialized in shrines and truly had been designated living national treasures. The breath of history there was so strong that it was rumored to stand out too much among the fake sets of samurai movies and Taiga dramas. It was most likely the largest scale piece of Japanese architecture in existence.

That green paradise covered a large chunk of the priciest land in Tokyo’s Akasaka district.

It was the Ushigashira Shrine.

More specifically, this was the Dragon Palace Chamber.

Once the girl known in the other world as Filinion passed through the Gate and Signed Out, her clothing changed to a bright red and white shrine maiden outfit. But unlike Beatrice, her appearance did not change much. Her long, fluffy, and blonde hair was held back in a hair tie that looked like a long white tube. Glasses adorned her face, but they had swirly coke-bottle lenses. Glasses technology had advanced well beyond that, but her complex mixture of near- and far-sightedness required this kind of unfashionable and special-ordered option.

Her hair and glasses did not match the shrine maiden outfit in the slightest, but hair color and sight were genetic and there was nothing she could do about it.

(And then there's...this.)

She looked a little annoyed as her eyes dropped to her own chest.

It was even larger than in the other world. It was said kimonos and other Japanese clothing did not mix well with large breasts, but she felt like the shrine maiden outfit made them stand out even more.

However, her life was proof enough that no amount of cursing her birth would slow their growth.

There were times when one was entirely powerless. She had learned that all the way back in the spring of her 5th year in elementary school, so she knew that directing her anger at the unfairness of the world would accomplish nothing.

"I beseech thee, I beseech thee, oh god..."

Those words were meant as a religious ritual, but they had so permeated her being that they slipped out like someone humming as they cooked. And in a tatami-floored shrine larger than a governor's mansion in a samurai movie, the blonde shrine maiden pulled out a smartphone.

She checked her email, SNS comments, and voicemail. She had so many unread messages piled up that she did not feel like checking through them. She had only been away for 2 or 3 days and it was already this bad. But she had to check them and she found a variety of things: entirely worthless direct messages, an alert about having your smartphone hijacked at suspicious wireless hotspots and then having your Experience Points

manipulated by someone else, homework assignments and invitations to hang out from her Shinto college, arrangements for a meeting concerning a banquet for the Yokohama Summit, and a wrong number. That last one was quite rare in this day and age when everyone just used their phone's address book. Sensing destiny in that rarity, she saved that one. And lastly...

A demand for an observation report on Holy Swordswoman Beatrice.

Her fingers briefly stopped.

She threw out that email while singing a nursery rhyme about a goat.

That kind of ruined her mood, so she decided to wait until later before unlocking new Magic with the Experience Points she had earned. She rudely walked through the giant shrine with smartphone in hand and then spoke in a voice loud enough to fill the entire space.

"Grandmother!? I'm back, grandmother!!"

"What's that racket for? Why is the older daughter such a screw-up...?"

"I'm exhausted, grandmother. I'd love some sukiyaki."

"Repeat our shrine's name to yourself and try that again, you moron."[\[1\]](#)

She heard a voice, but the old woman was nowhere to be seen. It was a lot like receiving an answer from someone in the attic, but she knew she would not find anyone if she checked there. This had already been "normal" by the time she was born and she had never actually seen the old woman.

But if she spoke, she would always receive an answer and she always found the bath ready or her favorite food prepared when she wanted to bathe or eat. She called this her grandmother, but it was not actually her

grandmother. Her real grandmother would claim it was their shrine's god, but always with a joking look on her face.

It was a strange relationship.

(Of course, it might just be someone speaking through a speaking tube or something.)

But that aside...

"It might be called the Ushigashira Shrine, but it's not like we actually worship a cow god, right? It refers to being given a cow's head, so it's about butchering them into beef to eat. We only took on this name as a symbol of the new culture that began in the Meiji era. We're like Dejima for the Imperial Household Agency and all its more ancient traditions. We act as the antenna that gathers all the knowledge and techniques we can, and once it's clear they don't have to worry about them destroying the culture around it, they can gradually incorporate it into the traditions. Isn't that what we do?"

And the most recent example of that was Magic.

That was one of the reasons she was so involved in the alternate world of Grandnir.

"So there's nothing wrong with us eating beef. In fact, I think we should be eating as much beef as we can, grandmother. And so I want sukiyaki."

"Honestly, it's probably that way you make these silly arguments to justify your desires that you were hit by divine punishment."

"Divine punishment?"

"I'm talking about those needlessly swollen breasts."

The glasses shrine maiden with her fluffy blonde hair held back in a long tube shape quickly crossed her hands in front of her chest.

But despite that perfect pose of defense, they still stuck out around her hands, making it all the more erotic. And it was certainly out of place for a shrine maiden.

“My boobs have nothing to do with this! Nothing at all!!”

“They cause so many problems when they’re too big, you know? Should this old lady tell you what path awaits you once you begin to age?”

“That’s hell!!”

She tearfully protested but only received cackling laughter in response. And once she was done teasing the shrine maiden, the “voice from the attic” changed the subject.

“We aren’t some dogs of the PSIA. Those bureaucrats in business suits may be asking you to monitor that Holy Swordswoman, but that doesn’t matter. If it isn’t part of our primary job, just ignore it. ...So aside from that, how were things in Grandnir?”

“Well.”

The fluffy blonde-haired shrine maiden in glasses was thankful that this was the normal way of things.

She would never admit it, but she was grateful for a guardian who could detect her refusal to betray her friend, support her in that, and take the blame for that softness inside her.

“It was a lot of fun. So much so that I found myself forgetting all about the real world.”

Part 2

Beatrice ran across a strange sight.

She was in the usual forest as she followed the path to Boo Boo's leaf house.

Suddenly, she heard a sharp female voice from behind the trees.

"Pick up the pace!!"

She then heard rustling in the underbrush.

She frowned and looked over to find a group casually running a short distance away. They were all of different ages, sexes, outfits, and Jobs. They slipped between trees and around obstacles like artificial wood panels while taking the shortest route to the woman yelling at them.

The woman had very white blonde hair tied in a braid and then tied in a large loop on her back that reached down to her waist. She wore what looked like Western mourning clothes with heavy boots added on, but that was not too unusual in this alternate world. Also, her chest beat Beatrice's.

(Is she a Summoner? No, she's using a bow, so maybe a Summon Hunter. Either way, that's rare.)

"You should be able to shorten it further and you're too inaccurate! What do you think you're doing here!?"

They all had a large box on their back.

Whenever the woman in the center looked inside one, she would give an exasperated sigh.

As for what they contained...

(Wow, those are Bitesize Duck Eggs. What a waste. I bet Boo Boo would be looking pretty sad right now.)

The boxes were packed full of bird eggs the size of ping pong balls, but if even 2 or 3 of them were broken, the woman would say the runner had failed.

“You aren’t allowed this kind of failure in an actual battle. And you, how many ribbons did you find tied on the branches on the way here? Tell me the number, the colors, and the locations.”

“Umm...uh...well...”

“Unacceptable. Redo it all from the beginning!! The terrain itself changes periodically in the actual Labyrinth. And you can’t spend days going out of your way to map it all. You need to constantly monitor the terrain as you move around so you can accurately record and share information on even the smallest changes! Measure distances in paces! You’ll be here until you can do all that. Now get going!!”

Beatrice started wondering if this was basic training for a Guild.

With the support of the Percentage-type Magic that formed their clothing, they could produce enough strength to slay a mid-level Chimaera or Griffon barehanded, but that was only placing a percentage modifier on their original body’s ability. If it was STRx200%, it would double their strength. It could sound cruel, but if your base value was low, equipment with a high percentage modifier would be wasted on you. For that reason, increasing one’s base strength could not be taken lightly.

That said...

(Can’t they just do that at a gym back in the original world?)



If they wanted to put a decent burden on their body to develop their muscles, the Percentage-type support actually got in the way. It was like trying to weightlift while wearing a powered suit. However, this may have been for the Guild's convenience. If the members were scattered across different countries and continents around the world, they would only be able to gather here.

It was still a strange sight to Beatrice, but then her eyes met those of the woman in the center of the group.

She gave a fake-looking smile that was as bright as the sun in the sky and she bowed.

"I pray you have a wonderful day."

And she offered a prayer.

The ring on her left hand's ring finger sparkled like a gold tooth in a nouveau riche old man's mouth.

"???"

Still confused, Beatrice tilted her head and continued on to Boo Boo's house.

She was only left with the feeling that she had run across something weird.

As she walked through the forest with questions filling her head, she heard a rustling in the underbrush next to her.

Oh, no. Is it more of that group? she wondered, but it was not.

"What is it, Beatrice? Are you out looking for food too?"

"Boo Boo."

She finally sighed and shook her head.

"I thought I would stop by your house, but...what are you doing, Boo Boo? What's with the giant basket on your back?"

"I'm taking my vegetables to the vegetable stand."

"?"

This sounded interesting, so she followed him to a small clearing in the forest. It was not as large as a field or a thicket. The space was only about the perfect size for a single-person tent and it had probably formed because a humongous mushroom called a Table Shroom had sucked all of the nutrients from the soil. It was rumored that mushroom's spores stimulated animals' hunger, making them eat there and drop bits of food to be absorbed into the soil, but there was no real evidence of that.

Boo Boo lowered the basket from his back, pulled out some Nyandetta Fruit and Molasses Plant, and placed them on the mushroom which was about the size of a small dinner table.

"Anyone can take these vegetables."

"So you've learned how to be a cultured man who does volunteer work?"

"I feel like you're making fun of me. And what's volunteer work?"

While he said that, he picked up the brick-like blocks of dried plants and beeswax that were already sitting on the giant mushroom umbrella. He then put them in his basket.

"With these, I'll be fine even on windy days. The fire won't go out."

"Solid fuel? This feels more like an unmanned bartering station than volunteer work. But, Boo Boo, why not pile up some handy stones to make a stove? Even if you just surround the fire on three sides like this, it should be much less affected by the wind."

“I don’t want to make any furniture too big or heavy to carry around with me. Then I’ll be reluctant to move. It’s best to have things I can carry with me if my forest home goes away.”

“...”

“Ow! Squeal! Beatrice, why are you punching my waist!?”

Meanwhile, Beatrice and Boo Boo turned away from the forest vegetable stand.

And after walking a short while, they heard some rustling behind them. The Holy Swordswoman turned around to find a few other men and women approaching the vegetable stand. They had flowing blonde hair and beautiful faces. They looked human enough, but they had pointed ears and their clothing had none of the identifying traits of Percentage-style Magic.

They were probably Elves or some other Nonhuman species.

“There are more vegetables here.”

“Oh, thank goodness.”

Beatrice smiled when she saw them celebrating.

But then...

“There’s a violent Iberian Orc wandering these woods. Hunting and gathering while making sure we don’t run into that monster isn’t easy, so this vegetable stand is a real blessing.”

She moved on reflex.

The Holy Swordswoman flared up and tried to turn back, but Boo Boo’s large hand rubbed her head.

"Leave them be," he said.

"But you're the one that left those vegetables!!"

"If they knew it was me, no one would come to get them. So we can't tell them."

"~~~~~!!!!!!"

She did not like it, but there was nothing she could do to change it.

Boo Boo had a long and difficult road ahead of him if he was make friends like he wanted.

But even as she thought that, Beatrice did not realize just how reassuring it was to him that he had at least one person who would think that for him.

Part 3

Beatrice noticed something when she arrived at Boo Boo's leaf house.

"Hey, Boo Boo. Haven't you gotten a lot more stuff lately?"

Beatrice had been exploring the Labyrinth with Boo Boo recently. When they defeated a Gimmick, they gained the gears that could be used as currency, but she doubted he was using those to shop. Sadly, Boo Boo's appearance made it difficult for him to visit the inn town.

That suggested that the unmanned bartering spot they had visited must have had a wide selection.

"Almost all of these are things the Nun brought to the vegetable stand. I carelessly ran across her near the vegetable stand, but she didn't run away when she saw me."

Boo Boo pointed at the objects scattered around his leaf house.

“This is a metal pot. I can make more tasty foods with it. This is a wood float. I don’t have to worry when I fall in the water with it.”

As he explained what it all was, he started rubbing his fangs with something like a large tropical leaf.

“Boo Boo, what is that?”

“Nn, this is a Blade-Honing Leaf the Nun gave me. I use it to groom myself!”

Iberian Orcs may have liked long and large fangs. Even in the natural environment of the planet Beatrice had been born on, moose had apparently developed their horns more to show off than to attack.

“The Nun said it must be like a man’s ‘you-know-what’.”

“Bfhhhh!!!??”

Beatrice had nothing in her mouth, but she still had trouble breathing like she was choking. Boo Boo only looked confused. The Holy Swordswoman did not want him to ask any awkward questions, so she did her best to change the subject.

“Th-then, um, what is that thing that looks like a keychain?”

“Oh. That’s the Circle.”

“?”

The name was too straightforward to give her any kind of clue. A ball of wood about the size of a ping pong ball had been covered in cloth and then a thin chain had been attached like it was a keychain, but she had no idea what it was for.

It looked adorable enough, but Beatrice heard something like grinding teeth. Surprisingly it came from above. She glanced up and saw the small light of a Fairy floating near the ceiling.

(Huh? Is the Fairy jealous because she was trying to repay him by making furniture and tools for him?)

Boo Boo was entirely oblivious to that slight tension.

And then a new visitor arrived.

“Boo Boo.”

Fairy Queen Sutriona poked her head in. Her voice sounded somehow weak, like she had a small fish bone caught in her throat.

“Do you know where my ear pick is? I’ve looked all over and this is the only place I haven’t checked.”

“Boo? What is an ear pick?”

“Eh? Then how do you clean your ears, Boo Boo?”

Beatrice asked without thinking, but he only tilted his head. It was true wild dogs and cats went their whole lives without cleaning out their ears and Iberian Orcs might be the same, but it was shocking to the Holy Swordswoman.

Meanwhile, Sutriona walked in and searched the house without asking permission.

“I came here to beg for dinner last night...and then I filled up on bat stewed in Milk Coconut. Then I just lay down and... Right, I slept here for a while, so...there it is! My ear pick!!”

“Ahn?”

Beatrice was a little irritated by some of what she heard, but Sutriona was not even looking her way. She either really liked the ear pick or her ears were bothering her because she immediately stuck the end in her ear while humming.

And Boo Boo cried out when he saw it.

“Squeal!?”

“Wh-what’s all the noise for? Don’t scare me like that.”

“Sutriona, are you tightening a screw in your head!?”

“No, you moron!! Does it look like I have a screw loose!?”

The silver-haired girl shouted back, but Beatrice saw this as her chance and started thinking. Or rather, she wanted to clean out Boo Boo’s ears.

So...

“I-I’m scared! Something’s going in my head!!”

“It’s okay, Boo Boo. Now don’t move.”

“I’m scared!!”

Boo Boo had used his incredible strength to beat down a dragon measuring more than 1000 meters, but a single ear pick caused him to squeeze his eyes shut and tense up his shoulders and his neck. It was an adorable sight.

Their great height difference prevented him from resting in her lap like they were lovers, so Boo Boo was sitting down while Beatrice stretched up on her tiptoes to peer into his ear and use the ear pick she had borrowed from Sutriona.

She could see inside easily enough thanks to the Magic flame (on her ahoge) she used as a light, but Boo Boo's ears were very different from a human's.

In fact...

"Oh, wow. It just keeps coming out! Ah ha ha!! Boo Boo, you're amazing! I think I found the mother lode!!"

"B-boo!?"

Beatrice sounded as excited as someone pulling off an impressive chain in a puzzle game. She had only found filth and it may have been nothing to celebrate, but it was like getting a bunch of filth from behind a dresser or window frame with some famous cleaning spokesman's gimmicky tool. Logic was irrelevant here. It was more about the sensory joy and achievement.

But...

"Huh?"

"Beatrice, don't sound so confused while doing something so important! Tremble tremble. What's wrong with my head? You might have tightened the screw too much and I'll explode!!"

She of course could not do anything like that with a mere ear pick.

"The ear pick can't reach all the way inside..."

"Well, it is meant for me," pointed out Sutriona.

"Oh, honestly! I want to get deeper! I can see the mother lode in there, but I can't reach it!!"

She struggled some more, but it was no use.

The Holy Swordswoman pulled the ear pick from Boo Boo's ear and spun it around in her hand.

"I think I need one made specifically for you... I hope there's a Mixing expert willing to make one in the inn town."

Part 4

"I can't do that."

The glasses cow known as White Witch Filinion was entirely useless.

They were in a bar/inn in the inn town. With a dead look in her eyes, Beatrice drew an X through the name Filinion on her frames drawn with fire illusion Magic, so Filinion shook her hands back and forth and gave the other girl a stiff smile.

"I mean, it's a category error. My specialty is recovery potions. Mixing doesn't let you make just anything, you know? There are all sorts of detailed categories."

"But an ear pick is..."

"Not a form of medicine. Anyone could set up shop at a rate of 3000 yen for 30 minutes."

That sounded pretty sketchy, but that was not the point that Beatrice wanted to argue.

"That means I'll have to find someone else to Mix for me. Um..."

"You need the construction type. You want someone who works with wood instead of metal, who provides logistical support in the inn town instead of directly exploring the Labyrinth, and who earns Experience Points by

selling consumable goods. ...A Craftsman would probably be your best bet."

As they discussed that, a familiar face quite roughly plopped down in an empty seat at their table.

It was Fighter Priest Armelina.

"Hey there, you two! I'm exhausted after a long day at work, so buy me something cold to drink."

"Hell no. If you're back from the Labyrinth, you've got to have a ton of gears."

"I know you know I just stuffed everything in my bag after defeating the Gimmicks and Traps. Checking through it all and dividing it out comes later."

The gears were used as currency in the inn town because they were filled with plenty of Experience Points. And it was true that rummaging through your bag after trudging back into town was like asking robbers to surround you.

"I know I picked up a ton of stuff, so I'll pay you back later. Oh, I know... I get a discount here, but I'll pay you back full price. That way you actually make some money. Anyway, just give me something to driiiiink."

"A discount?"

"Oh, you don't know, Beatrice?" nonchalantly replied Filinion.

The White Witch and Fighter Priest both reached into their pocket and pulled out something like a keychain they held between their fingers.

It was a small ball with a thin chain attached.

“It’s called a Circle.”

“That’s a pretty straightforward name.”

Beatrice placed a red line between some of the frames since Boo Boo had had one too, but then Filinion opened her mouth again.

“But, but. With one of these, a lot of the shops will give you discount or even serve you from a secret menu. And they’re starting to be a necessity when performing straw millionaire style Trades. After all, the trick is to buy low and sell high.”

Beatrice’s head was still filled with “???” over what the Circles even were, but then Filinion said something else.

“Oh, come to think of it, you might be able to use her shop, Beatrice.”

“Her?”

Yes, hadn’t Boo Boo mentioned it? He had run across someone near the forest vegetable stand. And most everything in his leaf house was something she had brought to the vegetable stand.

“The Nun who prepared our swimsuits before. You might be able to ask her to make a special order ear pick.”

Part 5

How were the mysterious Circle keychains and the Nun connected?

That question would be answered once Beatrice actually visited her.

After following a map she displayed in the air using fire illusion Magic, she arrived at the Gold Vein District which was known as an entertainment district. The inn town’s different districts could look very different and this one showed just how much excess fat humans carried around.

There was a large casino, an outdoor theatre, and a round battle arena. There was also a public bath that used hot spring water brought in from the northern mountains. The many forms flying by overhead were from a Griffon race that used giant balloons chained to the ground instead of corner posts. As was often the case around gambling establishments, there were also plenty of bars and dance halls. And no matter how well they were trained, Griffons were still animals, so one had to be careful to avoid any extra-large Griffon droppings that might fall from the sky.

The multiple rings that looked like crop circles on a distant hill must have been for a game of ultra-large darts. Metal beams were launched with Magic to see who could get theirs closest to the center.

The spaces too small for a building had been made into herb gardens. The plants looked much less healthy than those in Boo Boo's garden, so this may have been the results of the humans' cultivation research that Filinion had mentioned. And even those filler gardens were clearly meant to make some money.

This part of the city was entirely honest to its desires.

Countless gears changed hands along with the Experience Points contained within, so this was another way to learn Magic and obtain Pieces. But forgetting about exploring the Labyrinth and specializing in this seemed somehow wrong. It was like the ostrich that had forgotten how to fly.

"Huh? I just saw you, Beatrice."

"What are you doing here, Armelina? I thought you were exhausted after getting back from the Labyrinth."

The Holy Swordswoman sounded annoyed, but the Fighter Priest laughed shamelessly (despite being a priest).

“Heh heh. That’s exactly why I’m here. I worked up a sweat defeating those Gimmicks and earning these gears, so I wanted to invest them in a sure thing: baccarat, poker, craps, and roulette. Don’t you underestimate Armelina, Queen of the Table Games.”

She would be a laughing stock if she was broke and simply calling herself that, but Armelina had actually won so much that a few casinos had banned her from ever returning. She may have learned to lose every once in a while so the owners could keep some pride. It was starting to sound like a joke that her Job was of the priest variety.

“More importantly, if you’re here in the Gold Vein District, should I assume the battle arena’s Cheating Queen Beatrice is making her glorious return to the death matches? If so, I’m betting everything I’ve got on you! I can’t lose!!”

“God, no. What a pain. And you and I both know they want to see me lose so badly they’d set me up against something utterly ridiculous! Besides, I only ever fought there because I was pissed that they tried to capture Boo Boo for some kind of special event.”

The battle arena had begun as an experiment ground to see if destroyed Gimmicks could be brought up out of the Labyrinth, rebuilt, and reactivated as human pawns. That had never worked, so it was a shell of its former self.

“Chehh. They apparently have some new queen, but it’s so boring now that you don’t fight there. I think she’s an Ice Waterfall Princess. I bet she’s just itching to take you on, Beatrice.”

“Don’t joke about that. I get the feeling someone like that is going to attack me in the street one of these days.”

“Call me when it happens. I’ll start taking people’s bets on the spot.”

Beatrice was rapidly swallowed up by the atmosphere of the place.

It was overripe and decadent.

“Is Filinion away?”

“Don’t joke. She’s the Griffon racing expert, remember? She uses her obsession with guidebooks to determine the pedigree, muscular strength, stamina, temperament, and condition of all the Griffons lined up there. If she checks their fur, eye color, and scent, she can apparently tell you what they’ve been eating with perfect accuracy. When she joins forces with someone good at predicting the weather, she has almost all the data and is unbeatable.”

Beatrice sighed.

The Griffon racing was also the result of some research into taming Grandnir’s Nonhumans and animals for use in exploring the Labyrinth. In the end, it turned out it was too costly and dangerous for anyone but the rare summoning Jobs. All that remained was the right to use some for racing.

“Don’t be so grumpy. There’s nothing wrong with doing this stuff to take a break while also earning some Experience Points. ...And it’s hard for me to enjoy this stuff in reality due to my job, so of course I’m gonna go all out here in Grandnir.”

Armeline waved goodbye and left. Beatrice felt the exhaustion pressing down on her as she watched the other girl leave. The Gold Vein District was just that kind of place. Walking around and breathing the air was enough to drag people’s desires out to the surface.

And that may have been why the lone church in that district of pleasure and gambling looked as adorable as a flower growing through a crack in the asphalt.

However, there was no obvious cross on the roof.

And at the door, a white Nun held a basket made of woven plants as she passed something out to passersby with a smile.

"You are not alone. We all form one big circle."

"Oh, it's the Nun!"

"Here you go. I pray we can bring our hearts together into a circle."

"I never thought something like this would help save me money. I've been stuck in a losing streak, so I'm really thankful."

The teachings seemed to be different too.

The Nun must have noticed the puzzled Holy Swordswoman because she silently approached with oddly strange movements. She wore a white habit that hid as much skin as possible, but her body's veritable storm of curves was still clearly visible through it. It took all the mental fortitude Beatrice had to focus on the fact that she was above average herself, even if only by a few millimeters.

"These are the Circles. Would you like one?"

"Sure."

The Holy Swordswoman did not entirely understand, but she still took one of the keychain-like Circles.

It seemed to be the Nun's symbol, perhaps used to invite people to her church. Beatrice finally managed to fill in the Circle entry that was connected to Boo Boo, Filinion, and Armelina.

"I heard you were the one that made our swimsuits before."

"Oh, do you need another one?"

"No, um, I don't need a swimsuit, but I would like to ask for something else. It's about an ear pick."

"I will hear you out. Please come inside to talk."

They stepped inside the church's door.

They moved from a street of pleasure and gambling to the tranquil atmosphere of a church.

It seemed to be modeled after a church's chapel, but there were no religious symbols here either. For example, the windows were done in the colorful stained glass style, but they did not depict a scene from any kind of story or tradition. They only looked like pieces of colorful glass.

(A church, huh?)

Beatrice had no fixed religious beliefs, so her mind jumped to one of life's biggest events.

(A wedding. If they have a chapel here in Grandnir...wow, it's possible I might even be able to wear a wedding dress...)

A maiden-like fantasy briefly entered her mind, but the questions soon followed.

(Hm? With Boo Boo? How would someone as big as him wear a white suit? Oh, no. That one extra piece of information is causing my own ideal vision to crumble away...!!)

“So what was it you wanted to discuss? I am willing to do anything if it will make money for an emergency relief fund. Do you need something Mixed, or are you here to heal your illness?”

“Hm?”

Beatrice frowned at that second option, so the Nun clasped her hands in front of her chest.

“I do not know what things are like ‘over there’, but it seems that healing an illness inside Grandnir will also make you healthy ‘over there’. Objects and life forms cannot move back and forth, but anything related to the body’s health seems to remain.”

“Oh, right,” said Beatrice.

That was why that Guild in the forest had gone out of their way to train in Grandnir and why returning through the Gate while badly injured would only end in tragedy. It was always a good idea to heal oneself with Magic before returning.

“So is that why you’re here today?”

“N-no! Cough, cough... What I need is pretty simple. Can you make me an ear pick about this big? It might be large, but I would appreciate it if you made it very carefully.”

Beatrice used both hands to indicate the size of a cutlass worn at a Pirate’s hip. That order would normally receive a quizzical look in response, but the

white Nun said nothing, clasped her hands in front of her (large) chest, and smiled.

“That I can prepare for you right away. From what I’ve heard, people prefer those to be very simple without anything like slip resistance.”

“Um?”

“I can introduce you to an excellent craftsman. Hee hee. I originally only wanted to properly Appraise the Treasures from the Labyrinth and the products of Mixing in order to act as an intermediary between those who get into fights over those gears you use as currency.”

“No, um...”

“And there is a large difference between just selling the materials and selling a product created by Mixing a combination of those materials. I try to turn them into as much money as I can like that. The noncombat Jobs have to earn Experience Points without leaving the inn town, so when they were having trouble, they seemed to think I was a Nun and I suppose I took advantage of the warm welcome they gave me.”

“Not that.”

The people of the inn town did not view Iberian Orcs in a positive light. She did not want to have to answer too many questions here, but she still found her voice rising in a quizzical tone.

But the Nun did not seem to mind.

She reached for the hood covering her hair.

“I pray we can bring our hearts together into a circle...”

After reciting that phrase, she removed the hood to reveal the answer.

The Nun had wavy shoulder-length silver hair. And on both sides behind her ears, she had curled goat horns.

“I am also a Nonhuman. I am a Succubus. Since I look like this, I was accepted into the inn town, but I try to understand how it feels for those who are not.”

Beatrice was more than a little surprised.

The inn town was human territory. She had known Suttriona of the Break News used her lovely appearance to play around here, but it was a shock to find another Nonhuman blending in so perfectly.

In fact, she did not look like a Succubus at all.

She seemed far too pure to seduce a man, drag him into bed, and consume his life energy in his dreams.

Of course, that name had only been given to the Grandnir residents by the humans from earth, so that name may have been a source of bias on the level of defamation.

(I mean, she looks holier than that prayer group in the forest or a certain gambler I could mention.)

The nun who had called herself a Succubus smiled.

“So I will not ask too much about your situation. I know without having to ask that you are building a bridge between humans and Nonhumans. And in that case, I can see no reason not to help. I showed you my horns because I knew a bridge-builder like you would not treat me poorly.”

“Why...?” Beatrice gulped. “Why are you doing this?”

The human life was convenient, but it was not necessarily comfortable to all Nonhumans. Even if she wanted to enjoy the human life, gathering attention with this church and her preaching would be risky. And making proper Appraisals in order to stop conflicts could easily earn her grudges from the people she ended up stopping. If she just wanted to take advantage of the various services available, it would be more efficient and safer to blend into the crowd like Sutriona did.

But the Succubus nun was still smiling.

And as she did, a slight shadow fell over her face.

“That is the wrong question to ask.”

“?”

“I came to the inn town because I met someone. Because I wanted to be near him and walk by his side. That is why I am not hiding from human eyes. It was not the human life I wanted; it was a human.”

It all started to make sense. The Succubus also had someone in a relationship much like Beatrice and Boo Boo’s. Beatrice’s intuition told her as much.

But that intuition was too naïve.

“However, the gentleman who led me to love humans is now sleeping below the cold dirt.”

Beatrice could find nothing to say.

Humans came to Grandnir to explore the Labyrinth. That was risky and death was always a possibility, but knowing that and actually seeing it were two different things.

“Is that why you started a church?”

“Humans can freely move between the two worlds, but you cannot bring just anything back. Only your living body and the Shining Weapon that contains your knowledge and data. ...So of course, a certain problem arises.”

“The bodies of those who die in Grandnir.”

No matter how it happened, the people who died here could not return to earth. Their bodies could only be buried in Grandnir. An adolescent girl like Beatrice could not really picture a world after her death, but it was a possibility every day she was involved in exploring the Labyrinth.

“So I began to wonder if I could do anything to fulfill their hearts and help them rest in peace. And I ultimately decided it would be best to copy what you humans do as you are several steps ahead of us.” The silver-haired Succubus smiled calmly. “I do not know if this is the right thing to do. It might be entirely misguided and only provide me with self-satisfaction. But I simply had to find something I could do for those who breathed their last in this land.”

“You’re not doing anything wrong,” naturally responded Beatrice. “You don’t need to save up a ton of money. Holding a parade of a funeral and building a pure gold altar isn’t going to make the dead smile. It’s not about how much you spend. Your intentions mean so much more when it comes to saving them.”

“Thank you very much.”

The Nun in a white habit looked surprised at first, but then she smiled.

And a moment later, a high-pitched sound rang out.

Some kind of external force had smashed the stained glass window.

“!?”

Beatrice immediately reached for the Shining Weapon rapier at her hip and used a wall formed from an explosive blast to protect the Succubus from the colorful shards of glass.

A fist-sized stone rolled across the floor.

That alone was nearly enough for Beatrice’s head to boil over.

The tranquility had been broken.

The poisonous air of pleasure and gambling seemed to invade the church from beyond the broken glass.

“Who did that!?”

She gave into her anger by shouting, running over, and tackling open the church door.

The scene outside was entirely peaceful.

Someone looked back and forth between the number burnt into a wooden ticket and the Griffons flying through the sky. Someone with a red face visited yet another bar to either celebrate a victory or grieve a loss. Someone carried a bag stuffed full of gears and started listening to some sketchy investment talk on the roadside. None of them had thrown the stone. All of the passersby were acting normally and none of them even looked Beatrice’s way.

But that was the weird part.

(What is this? Everyone is *too* indifferent.)

The sound of shattering glass would linger in people's ears. Anyone who did not know what was happening would come to a stop and turn toward the source of the sound. And unlike Beatrice and the Succubus inside, the people outside had to have seen the person who threw the stone. She was not going to ask them to capture whoever it was, but there was definitely something wrong with showing no reaction whatsoever. It should have at least been clear that something had happened.

So what was this?

(It isn't that they don't know. They know, but they're pretending they didn't see it. Are they treating this church like it doesn't exist?)

She thought she saw something flashing in the crowd.

It was an ugly sparkle like from a nouveau riche old man's golden tooth.

She sensed a sticky sort of malice that was different from jeering or angry yelling.

It was a stone this time, but what if the people would react the same under different circumstances? What if a group of men wielding blades and Shining Weapons arrived at the church's front entrance? And what if Beatrice was not there when it happened? How would these people respond to the sounds of screams and destruction coming from the building?

"Oh, dear."

Finally and far too late, the Succubus appeared behind Beatrice with her hood back on.

"This kind of thing has been happening a lot lately. Well, I can have glass prepared right away with Mixing, so I'm just glad no one out front was harmed."

Part 6

“Boo...”

In the mountain, a leaf house became the epicenter of a great tremor.

“Bgghh!! Bbhhh! Mumble, mumble...then who in the mansion is really the killer...bhhh!!”

After killing some large prey, Boo Boo did not have to worry about food for a few days. When that happened, he tended to nap all day long. The wild animals were too afraid to approach the center of the blast, but there was one exception: Meridiana, the palm-sized Fairy who lived in his house.

“Hm, hm, hm, hmm.”



She was on the roof of the triangular house that resembled a giant tent. The leaf roof had a certain level of elasticity, so she had embedded half a broken Bucket Ostrich Egg shell in it, filled that with water warmed to the perfect temperature, and then mixed in some of a Milk Coconut's sweet juice that was good for the skin.

What did this create?

A bath of course.

"Ahhh, you just can't beat an open-air bath..."

Meridiana rested her elbows on the edge of the shell and soaked in the white water while lying nearly face down.

Milk Coconut and Molasses Plant were known to be good for the skin, so even the humans used them. She did not know how things worked on the world they called Earth, but polishing their skin here apparently affected them back there too.

Fairies were at the bottom of the food chain, so they normally would be snatched away by a bird of prey if they defenselessly exposed their skin in such an open area. She was being somewhat cautious by lying face down and thus keeping her wings dry and able to read the air currents, but how useful would that really be if she was attacked? This luxury was entirely thanks to the ultimate safety provided by Boo Boo's loud snoring.

(But curse that Nun for winning his heart with gifts! I'm the one that's supposed to be repaying him by secretly making furniture and tools for him. No, stop this, stop this. I need to relax in the bath and think about what I can do for Boo Boo. Grind, grind, grind.)

"Meridiana."

Just as she started grinding her teeth, someone spoke to her in her Fairy safe zone.

“I see you are enjoying yourself as much as you can, Meridiana. I’m jealous in a way.”

“Oh, Lady Morgan.”

Another small Fairy fluttered down. Morgan’s lime green hair was gathered behind her head, she wore orange clothing, and she had large cicada-like wings. She was the elder of the Fairy village and she rarely appeared to people since she was more cautious than Meridiana, so the human fortunetellers had erroneously concluded that simply seeing her was a harbinger of great fortune or misfortune.

“It has taken me far too long to greet Sir Boo Boo for saving you and Fairies as a whole. I intended to thank him, but it does not look like that will be happening.”

“He’ll get up in a flash when danger is approaching, but there’s no waking him unless he senses something that qualifies as a threat for someone as powerful as him.”

“I’m not sure if that qualifies as sharp or dull. Sigh.” Morgan skillfully hovered in the sky and shook her head. “I could never disturb his sleep for our convenience. I suppose I will simply leave my thanks for today and wait to greet him at a later date.”

“Oh, did you bring something for him? Is it food?”

Meridiana could not just let the village elder go on her own, so she left the large egg bath, dried off her body, donned her pink dress, and guided the guest to the house’s owner below.

Boo Boo lay face up in the middle of the leaf house.

Iberian Orc bodies were sturdy, so he apparently did not need a bed or even a blanket.

“Hm, so this is the great hero who drove back the wicked dragon and freed of from the chains of that horrific custom.”

“B-Boo Boo might look frightening, but he’s really nice! Um, it might be super hard to tell from your first impression though!!”

“I was thinking nothing of the sort. And you might be trying to help, but that would actually hurt him. Be more careful.”

Morgan scolded the other Fairy and fluttered around.

She landed on the forehead of the giant porcine face.

The Fairy elder kneeled down, bowed her head, and spoke in a deep and heavy voice.

“It took me far too long to greet you. My name is Morgan. My power is lacking, but I am the elder who leads the Fairies in Lady Suttriona’s absence. So I must thank you on everyone’s behalf. And I must provide a physical sign of our thanks. Just as you stood up to a literal mountain of a dragon for us, we will offer you endless blessings.”

“Ah!!”

Meridiana covered her mouth with a hand and cried out.

As she kneeled, Morgan brought her lips down toward Boo Boo’s colossal forehead.

“Ahh! Ahh!! Ahhhhh!!!!”

“Be quiet, Meridiana. I am trying to perform a sacred ritual.”

“But, um, uh, with the way things are and with his relationship with Beatrice, I’m still trying to figure out what kind of distance to keep between us, so how can you kiss him so easily!?!?”

“How? The most we Fairies can do is provide labor or offer our blessings.”

Meridiana gave another bizarre cry and covered her face with both hands. Her thoughts had immediately gone in the labor direction when it came to repaying him, so she may have been a true meathead despite her slender appearance.

“Th-th-th-th-th-th-th-then I’ll give Boo Boo a Fairy’s blessing too!!”

“Stop. I just now did so on behalf of all Fairies. If a lower Fairy like you does so now, the blessings could easily conflict. Anything else would be meaningless.”

“Vwaaahhh!!”

There was nothing she could do, but Meridiana could not stop yelling. And yet Boo Boo continued snoring and showed no sign of waking.

Morgan did not seem bothered either since the point of her argument was somewhat different from Meridiana’s.

“If you think of anything we can do for Sir Boo Boo, please let me know. Although Lady Suttriona might know more about the human settlement.”

“Vwahh, vwahhh!! ...Vwah?”

“There have apparently been some ominous actions taken by the human Guild known as the Religious Society. If he had no interest in the humans, he could possibly avoid getting dragged into this mess...but getting

involved in everything seems to be what Sir Boo Boo does. It couldn't hurt for you to hear this."

"Um, the Religious Society, you say?"

"To be honest, I do not know much about human mythology, but this is exactly what it sounds like: a group gathered for religious reasons. They tend to take exclusionary actions based in elitism and it would be difficult to say they are very kind in their treatment of Nonhumans like us. They say all people are equal, but they turn around and say that anyone who does not understand them does not qualify as a person. To sum up: be careful."

Part 7

The change was like seeing a synthetic detergent muddying a stream that had previously been so refreshingly clear that the fish could be seen swimming through it.

A few days had passed since then.

The atmosphere had clearly changed in the inn town that functioned as the humans' base of activity.

"Beatrice, Beatrice!"

Someone called out to the Holy Swordswoman who was fiercely haggling at an open-air shop where shopkeeper and customer trusted each other equally little.

The hushed voice came from White Witch Filinion.

Unable to get a satisfactory result, Beatrice left the already narrow road and entered an alley that was little more than a gap between buildings.

Fighter Priest Armelina also waited there.

“Why are both of you here?”

“To warn you, obviously. You’re the only one still walking around the inn town showing off their Circle so blatantly. You need to be careful.”

“?”

She was the only one? Hadn’t those two been the ones showing off their Circles just the other day? Beatrice looked puzzled, so Filinion and Armelina exchanged a glance before hesitantly reaching into their pockets. They pulled out identical Circles.

“Showing it off so blatantly is the problem.”

“Yes, a fairly radical Guild is apparently growing more active. As a group or an individual, I honestly want nothing to do with the Religious Society.”

“You’re kidding, right? The Religious Societ-...!?”

The Holy Swordswoman started to yell, so the other two girls quickly covered her mouth.

The Religious Society.

To some extent, every mythology and religion that humans believed in mentioned how humans were to view the world. Some said the world had been created and some said mankind had been given the world. The scope of what it mentioned varied greatly. It could be as small as a village or island, it could be a city or nation, and it could even be the entire planet or the entire universe.

But a certain problem had arisen.

Not one religious text or scripture mentioned the alternate world of Grandnir.

If nothing was written about it, what were they to do with it?

Especially when the people who visited Grandnir had evolved into beings who could wield the instant paranormal power of Magic...or to put it another way, miracles.

"The field of religion has been thrown into chaos," said Fighter Priest Armelina as she gently removed her hand from Beatrice's mouth.

"Grandnir is honestly a thorn in their side, so they would really prefer it if we could erase the fact that it had ever been discovered. But mankind can no longer give up Grandnir after the technological revolutions brought about by the Pieces. It would be like abolishing the internet and cellphones and being left behind by the rest of the world. They know they will only decline if they don't accept these new advancements, but they're all really on edge about how to deal with it all. And the Religious Society has come to power within all that. They're the real deal. They might be even worse than Elkiad from before."

"We don't know who the Religious Society is." White Witch Filinion shrugged and sighed. "Maybe they're a secret division of the world's largest monotheistic religion and maybe they're a collection of people from various religions who hate the very existence of Grandnir. After all, *we can't rely on what they look like here*. Even if they performed a public massacre in the inn town, they would escape any kind of punishment once they returned to earth."

"In Grandnir, our equipment adjusts even our facial features. If they wore different equipment each time they came here, they would have a new face each time. Of course, that normally doesn't happen because everyone has their own favorite Parameters."

"..."

“Anyway, be on the lookout for gold rings without any kind of symbol on them. They have no uniform and perfectly blend into their surroundings, but it’s been discovered that they do wear a pure gold ring on their left hand’s ring finger. They apparently engrave their god’s name in it, melt it, and then rework it into a different form to marry their faith in a way no one will recognize.”

“I see.”

It finally clicked for Beatrice.

She had seen that a few times after something had seemed a little odd. She had seen the glitter of an actual pure gold ring and not just some Magic shaped like that. *An experiment from a much older era* had proven that materials could not be transported between earth and the other world, so these people must have gone out of their way to make a ring in Grandnir and leave it in a safe place when they returned to earth.

“But even if the ring is on their left hand’s ring finger, they aren’t necessarily from the West. That tradition has spread all around the world and another culture could always be adopting it for camouflage. From our thick armor to our underwear, all of our equipment is just Magic shaped like that, right? So if you see someone wearing actual physical gold, you should be suspicious.”

Beatrice once more looked down at her keychain-like Circle.

She once more judged the value placed inside it, even if its maker had not done so intentionally.

“Filinion, Armelina. ...How much do you know about that Nun?”

“You mean that she’s actually a Nonhuman and a Succubus? She might think she’s hiding it, but everyone knows. It’s an open secret.”

“Nonhumans can’t use Magic. For the Mixing of the swimsuits and whatever else, she apparently asks a human she knows to do it. But anyway...”

Armelina trailed off when they heard a commotion on the street.

They peeked out from the alley and saw some men and women stomping around and carrying placards made from crude wooden panels. Those signs said “say no to monsters” and “protect the human inn town”.

(They sure let themselves be influenced easily...)

Beatrice sighed and started speaking again.

“If ‘everyone’ knows, then there’s obviously a chance the Religious Society knows.”

What would they think of that?

The various religions born on earth were simply incompatible with another world like Grandnir. The issues surrounding interpretations of their scriptures were throwing them into chaos, so what would they think when they learned that a new religion was being born here?

That religion was meant to provide peaceful rest to those who died in another world and could not return. It was an innocent thing that copied what the humans did and used a simple circle as a symbol.

But none of that mattered.

Very little could be brought back between the two worlds. Knowledge and techniques – or more simply, memories and information – were the only

small blessings there. And that included religion and doctrine. Plus, hadn't Filinion pointed out that people could look completely different on earth and in Grandnir? And that no matter what someone did in Grandnir, it could not be traced back to them once they returned to earth?

That meant one thing:

"No one can know how far a religious born in Grandnir would spread."

"But Grandnir is so small we could walk completely around it in 3 days. People of every race and nationality gather here using the Gates located around the world."

"In the past, it was known as spy heaven where no one could monitor you, but this feels like a further derivation of that. If some kind of explosive fad begins here in Grandnir, it would be brought back to every part of the world in the blink of an eye. The spread of such things is usually estimated using the starting point, so those estimates would be useless."

That Succubus may not have intended to start an invasion.

But what she had done was enough for the religions having enough trouble already. Even if they closed all of the Gates and pretended Grandnir had never existed, they could not prevent the information brought back from spreading as a new religion called the Church of the Circle.

What if that fear was spreading?

What if the majority started agreeing that risk should be removed as soon as possible?

"Dammit..."

Beatrice did not have time to draw out frames and red lines with her fire illusion Magic.

She remembered the stone thrown through the church window. She remembered the giant blind spot created in a public area when everyone feigned indifference. If that kind of thing was moving on the level of a Guild like the Religious Society, then how much violence would assault that Succubus in broad daylight while she was trapped in that cage of indifference?

She could not return the man she had once lived with to his original world. She could not even return a hair from his head.

So she had at least wanted to give him a peaceful and undisturbed rest here in Grandnir's soil.

That was all she had wanted to do.

"Dammit!!"

"Um, hey, Beatrice? Didn't we *just* say not to get involved in all this!?"

"I ordered an ear pick for Boo Boo from her. I'm not letting anything happen to her before I get it!"

"Okay, fine, you softhearted fool! So we just have to stick our heads into this too, do we!?"

All three of them started running.

Beatrice had to wonder which of them was really the softhearted fool, but she was not stupid enough to forget her appreciation of having someone to support her.

Even if every district was very different, it was still just a human city built alongside those exploring the Labyrinth. It was only so large. A short run was all it took to reach the Gold Vein District and all its pleasure and gambling.

Beatrice called up a detailed map of the district using fire illusion Magic and Armelina asked the most fundamental question.

“But how are we going to get her to safety? As we already mentioned, Grandnir is only an island we can walk around in 3 days. If the Religious Society hunts her down with pure numbers, there’s no escape. And since that Nun is a Nonhuman, we can’t invite her to earth through a Gate.”

“But since she was born and raised in Grandnir, she doesn’t have to worry about her internal clock getting screwed up. She doesn’t have to return every few days to avoid serious mental and physical effects, so time should be on her side.”

“You mean...?”

“She can hide in the vast underground expanse of the Labyrinth, or she can head out to sea in a boat loaded with as much food as it can hold, just like that Next Voyager. If she can buy herself enough time in some environment where it’s hard to hunt her down, she should be able to survi-...”

She trailed off.

A pillar of fire rose above the roofs of the buildings in the direction they were headed.

Any theoretical odds of victory were pointless if they did not arrive in time.

Even if they were only one second or one instant too late, they could not stop a tragedy that was beyond their reach.

“Goddammit!!”

Part 8

It had begun a bit earlier.

It was a moonlit evening. Partway up a mountain far away from the inn town – that coincidentally happened to be opposite the slope on which Boo Boo’s house was built – marched a group wearing bluish-black dresses much like mourning clothes and with pure gold rings on their left ring fingers. They hid their faces behind thin veils and they held modern-looking bows with large stabilizers sticking out on the front. They were not actually bows because they had short close-quarters combat blades attached to either end and because they were only Shining Weapons meant to use Magic.

They were the Religious Society.

Any further truth was hidden by their veils, but their goal was clear: the Flask Flower Garden.

Deep, deep in the woods was a clearing covered in blooming flowers. They were all rare Mixing ingredients that humans could not cultivate: Joyful Belladonna, Angry Digitalis, Sorrowful Sage, etc. Some of them even emitted a faint light, perhaps to more efficiently gather the flying insects that would carry their pollen. A translucent dome covered the garden overhead. Most likely, the giant mushrooms were manipulating the sunlight to create the humidity needed to supply the moisture and nutrients that made this colorful miracle possible.

“Ileana!!”

But the Religious Society was not after the herbs.

The woman in the center of the group raised her voice.

Her whitish blonde hair was braided and bent in a U-shape, but it still reached her waist. If the large loop on her back was undone, it would likely trail along the ground behind her.

“We of the Religious Society have come for your help in accordance with our agreement! Answer our summons, beast that has received the power to comprehend the words of the baptized. Just this once, wield your power as a Break News for us!!”

The flower garden stirred.

But no wind was blowing. A new form rose up from the sea of colorful flowers.

It was a symbol of the night who was even more bewitching than the shining full moon.

It was a beautiful woman with brown skin and long light blue hair. Her bodylines were covered by plants resembling grape vines and leaves and she wore just the framework of a long skirt that resembled a bird cage. She was one of the monsters that could cause both resurrection and death and whose cursed cry could destroy all enemies, biological or mechanical.

She was the ruler of the flower garden and the greatest Mandragora.

She was a plant Break News.

Her name was Ileana.

“You have some nerve, girl. I only responded to your voice since you are the descendants of those who once asked me to protect this land.”

“This land” was Enter Kosmos. It was the remnants of a former human attempt to send a giant tower stabbing upside down into the ground to stop the Labyrinth from periodically restructuring itself. With this and the Next Voyager ship on the beach, it was easy to guess what kind of conflict had once existed in Grandnir between the superpowers of the east and west.

But the girl in Western mourning clothes ignored the giant gravestone with its garden of flowers dedicated to it.

“Are you really prepared to do that? We normally would have exterminated you immediately, but we held off and intend to give you the honor of working as our right arm.”

“Heh heh. I’m sure you know exactly whose flexibility has saved which side of this encounter.”

Their surroundings rustled as Ileana laughed.

But this was not the Religious Society’s vanguard giving off killer intent.

The extent and density of flowers was growing. The world itself seemed to surround the humans and it attempted to crush everything in every direction with a great pressure that was different from hostility or malice.

But the veiled woman in mourning clothes spoke again as if to challenge the plant woman.

“Do you intend to accept our offer?”

“I’ll do it.”

The greatest of the simultaneously toxic and healing Mandragoras snapped her fingers while adorned in fruit decorations.

The deadly flower garden’s pressure dispersed and became no more than a sea of beautiful petals once more.

And the night sneered.

“But when I act, I require something of equivalent value. I desire a pure virgin. That should be easy enough for the moral Religious Society to

acquire. After all, you've essentially been preparing yourselves as detonators for this."

"..."

"I want you." The Break News pointed her index finger at the woman's modest chest. "Let's see how determined you are to get this paradox with a soul to act. How much are you willing to risk your own body? Surely you didn't think you alone could escape unscathed. If you can convince me here, I will wield my full power for you."

"That is fine."

"Hah hah!! Not even a second of hesitation!? Now that I can't hope to match. Even if I was just having some fun...no, *because* I was just having some fun, I'd have to question your sensibilities if you hadn't given it your all!!"

Ileana in the plant dress was the only one laughing.

The speed of the woman's answer came from the strength that she had inherited from the previous leader of the Religious Society and that she would pass on to the next generation.

"You, the one offering herself as a sacrifice. What's your name?"

"Gruagach."

"Then, brave but pitiable Gruagach, what is it you want from a paradox like me?"

"Your job this time is not to hunt some great target. You are to purge a Nonhuman ranked below the Break News. But the location is something of a problem: she has blended into the human base of the inn town. Will you take on that dirty job? You may take out the entire town if necessary."

“Understood,” whispered Ileana before taking a breath.

She then spoke to the flower offerings so no one else could hear.

“Purging a Nonhuman, is it? I don’t like the sound of that. It reminds me of what happened to the Iberian Orcs.”

Part 9

An intense pillar of fire rose in one corner of the inn town.

Something fell around Beatrice’s group. The gears used as currency were flying all around the Gold Vein District that contained casinos and the battle arena. The winged monsters being prepared for the Griffon race were rampaging around overhead and nearly throwing their riders off of them.

Beatrice’s fire specialty allowed her to immediately calculate the scope of the damage.

“Based on the height of the pillar of fire, that was the equivalent of 87 kilos of TNT, assuming it wasn’t a directional blast. That would’ve blown a stone church open like a flower!!”

“Are you serious...? If they start blasting things like this, the entire inn town’ll be destroyed!”

“Would even the Religious Society go that far? The inn town is an important base for everyone in Grandnir. Even if they’re a large organization...no, specifically because they know the power of numbers, they have to know what will happen if they make an enemy of all humankind.”

If the battle was between the church’s Nun and the Religious Society, it might seem unwinnable.

But what if it developed into a larger battle between the inn town and the Religious Society and all of the level cap fighters joined forces against them? It seemed like the positions of minority and majority would be overturned and the Religious Society would be the one on the run.

But that question was answered once they arrived on the scene.

“What is that?”

As they ran down the gear-covered road, Armelina looked at the smoke-marred blue sky.

No, her eyes were on the roof of a tall building. It was the bell tower that signaled the final round of the Griffon race. A tall woman with brown skin and light blue hair stood on the edge...no, the corner of the roof.

Her hair and skin both emitted an eerie light.

She spread her arms like an opera singer.

Beatrice felt a chill down her spine although she did not know why.

Immediately, her mind exploded.

An ultra-high frequency “cry” filled the entire inn town.

Beatrice immediately activated the Shining Weapon rapier at her hip, but she was too slow. The ear-splitting scream passed right through the smokescreen meant to throw off an enemy’s aim and the girl was slammed back-first into a brick wall. Her thoughts lost all continuity, like they were being mixed up by a blender, and she could barely tell up from down.

“Kah...!! Agwah!?”

“ ... ”

The Griffons finally fell from the sky.

White Witch Filinion wobbled on her feet and pulled out something. The palm-sized rectangular bottle looked like something a mountain climber would carry around and it likely contained some sort of recovery potion. No, the bottle itself may have been a potion, just like the candy beer bottles used for filming dramas. After unscrewing the cap half a turn, she tossed it into the air. The bottle shattered on its own, the shards mixed with the liquid inside, the potion bubbled, and it rained down as a purifying mist. Finally, Beatrice's group was freed from the intense and nauseating headache.

Armeline shook her head with a hand on the wall.

"What happened and what did you do? My head isn't spinning anymore, but that cry hasn't stopped! It's kind of scary!!"

"I intentionally messed up a recovery potion to obstruct the cry's transmission. This would normally count as poisoning us, but it's better than continuing to let that affect us."

"That cry is from a Mandragora, right?" asked Armeline. "Y'know, like the one we used to trap the Cat Sith who were ransacking Boo Boo's garden... But I've never heard of one powerful enough to affect an entire town!"

Beatrice gulped and answered.

"...A Break News."

She doubted it was a coincidence that this monster in a plant dress had shown up now.

Did that mean the Religious Society had tamed a paradox with a soul?

“They really intend to take us all on directly. But to prevent a major battle to protect the inn town, they used the very first wave to knock out anyone who might fight back. That’s the kind of over-the-top plan they’re going with!”

The Religious Society was making an enemy of all the humans in Grandnir, but the humans generally only used the inn town and the Labyrinth. People who walked around the island like Beatrice were a rarity. The people in the Labyrinth below the thick bedrock would not notice the commotion and could be safely ignored for the time being, so making a preemptive strike on the inn town was enough to neutralize most everyone.

“So they’re willing to slaughter people from every nation and every race if it lets them kill that one Succubus?”

“They’re never going to give up before they finish this. We need to get the Nun out of there!!”

The church was nearby.

Beatrice’s group made one last spurt, but the White Witch’s potion must not have been perfect. They were fortunate to have any way at all of resisting the Break News’s ferocious attack, but the way the sound echoed off the walls and ground started to make their heads spin again.

And that slowed them down somewhat.

They turned the last corner and arrived in front of the church. No, at this point it was better called the ruins of the church. There was only a pile of rubble there and the neighboring buildings had also collapsed. Gray dust spread from there and someone was dragged out into the open.

It was the sexy Nun in a white habit.

The explosion had blown away the entire building, so it was doubtful she had escaped its effects. It was possible she was tougher than a human, but even that had its limits.

It might have helped her to play dead. She might have been able to escape through the dust before the search through the rubble began.

But she had done neither.

Something fell from between her arms: keychain-like Circles.

They were a symbol of the peaceful slumber she desired for the people who had fallen in this land. They fell to the cracked ground and were trampled by the group hidden by mourning clothes and veils.

“Ahh!!”

The Nun was thrown out in front of the wall that was no longer attached to a building. They formed a half circle around her and aimed their bow-like Shining Weapons at her.

The malice they sent her way felt like arrows with sharp barbs on the end.

“God will save all people.”

“That means monsters were never even being considered.”

“A Nonhuman mimicking human faith is just laughable.”

“Purge her.”

“Punish the one who makes a mockery of our faith!”

It was like an execution by firing squad.

Since they could use Magic powerful enough to blow up the stone church, it went without saying what would happen to her. Nothing at all would remain if they concentrated their fire on her.

“Make iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiit!!!!”

Beatrice let out a cry.

No, she tried to.

But just before she could, her head shook. Her vision blurred and her thoughts fell apart. It was the Mandragora Break News. She had likely focused her aim on whoever was still moving. The intense scream neutralized the Holy Swordswoman like an acoustic weapon.

Beatrice tried to prop herself up on a wall, but she even failed at that.

As she tasted the dirt in her mouth, she realized the truth.

(It's over. I won't reach her...)

Beatrice was their strongest fighter, so if she could not do it, neither could Filinion or Armelina. And if they could not reach her, what would happen to the harmless Nun?

It was over.

There was nothing they could do.

And then Beatrice overturned her assumptions and causality by thinking of a certain face.

(Boo Boo...!!)

A moment later, she heard a coldhearted blast of destruction in a corner of the inn town.

Part 10

Perhaps what she was doing was wrong.

Perhaps her thoughts would never reach the dead.

She had wondered that countless times, but the Succubus had still put on her habit and gone out into the inn town. They had literally been from different worlds, but they had been able to speak and share their feelings. Unable to forget him and unable to abandon him, the Succubus had never stopped seeking her vision of human and Nonhuman living together.

The dead would never return and she was not looking for someone to replace the dead, but...

“Hey, baby. I’ll show you that humans aren’t completely worthless.”

She would never forget what he had said when they first met.

It had been entirely unrelated to exploring the Labyrinth or acquiring the Magic and Pieces that could revolutionize human society. It had also had nothing to do with the Succubus herself. She had happened across a many-headed Hydra attacking a Dwarf in the forest, but after she had abandoned the Dwarf as a sacrifice to “survival of the fittest”, a ferocious man had tapped her on the shoulder with a smile on his face.

He would save people for nothing in return.

He would wish for the happiness of complete strangers.

He would rush headlong into danger with his heavy armor and giant axe. She had admired his lifestyle. She had wondered how he could do that. Meanwhile, the man had bothered to build barrels in Grandnir to distill fruit. And as he drank a cup of his own product, he had answered her without giving it any thought.

“It’s not like I have any real reason. Life is finite and I want to have fun and enjoy every minute and every second of it, so what good is worrying over the same things over and over? So even if it’s a bit of a pain, I’ve gotta solve all the trouble I happen across. Basically, it’s about getting a good night’s sleep. A drink of victory tastes so much better than one meant to distract you from a loss. I’m an honest person, so I want my drink to taste the best it can.”

So she had gone with him.

Even inside the Labyrinth that the Grandnir-born Nonhumans never even approached. She had not had a reason for it, but she had thought giving her all to something illogical might help her get closer to that man.

They had laughed together, they had overcome hardship, they had argued and grabbed at each other’s hair, and they had rolled around on the ground and made up.

At some point, she had stood right next to that man with the short black hair. And she had lain next to him too.

She had finally grasped what it was she had longed for.

It was finally hers.

“I know it can never happen, but I can’t help but think about it. I wish I could show it to you. My home is small, but it’s got this huge cherry tree outside. Every year during flower viewing season, a bunch of old guys I’ve never seen before gather in the yard with bottles of sake in hand. I guess you wouldn’t know what cherry blossoms are, would you? If only they grew here in Grandnir too.”

She was thrown against the one wall of the church that was still standing, she was surrounded, and several Shining Weapon bows were aimed her way. The Succubus in the white habit smiled thinly when she saw this other face of humanity.

Still on the ground, she looked to the trampled Circles.

“I pray we can bring our hearts together into a circle...”

Maybe she really had been wrong. Maybe these had only been for her own self-satisfaction. Maybe they had brought no one peace and had only caused trouble for the humans.

“But...still...”

She did not need to beg for her life.

If she had failed, then she had failed. If she had to bear the responsibility for this chaos, then she was willing to die for it.

“Even if none of it worked out...”

She did not know the human rules, but this was Grandnir. If there was an afterlife, she was sure to go to the same place. She doubted humans and Nonhumans would be separated and sent to different places.

“I won’t be lonely any longer.”

So she needed to smile now.

“Honey, I’ll be with you soon.”

She slowly exhaled and started to close her eyes.

But at that very moment, something blew away all of the buildings in that corner of the inn town.

It was not human Magic.

This was much simpler: a collision from an enormous mass. The Succubus had no way of knowing, but it was a lot like the site of a large passenger plane crash. The nearby casino and battle arena were blown away and gears erupted like a volcano and scattered across the town. The attackers in Western mourning clothes and veils were struck by rubble and blown into the air by the wind. The Nun in the white habit did not initially know what had happened. It was on such a large scale that she only saw a giant wall no matter how high she looked.

It was a black dragon standing 1000 meters tall.

It was the Thousand Dragon of the Break News.

“Tch! Ileana!!” shouted one of the women in veils.

Atop the bell tower that signaled the final round of the Griffon race, a brown woman with long, light blue hair glared at the black dragon. And they both roared at the same time. One was the killer cry of a Mandragora and the other was the ultra- pressurized water breath fired from the mouth of the giant dragon that symbolized water and rainclouds. The two attacks collided at the midpoint, dispersed, and were diverted away. But the dragon’s attack still mercilessly broke the bell tower that Ileana stood on. She vanished along with the great mass of the collapsing stone tower.

The dragon spoke in an ultra-low frequency growl that humans probably could not hear.

“That is not enough to defeat another Break News. She will be getting up soon enough. Climb on, Succubus. I will take you from here before that happens.”

“Eh? Um...”

“That clothing seems to be dedicated to something, but I do not know what it is you believe in. I have no way of telling what has set you at odds with the humans, so I have nothing telling me to protect you and no argument to support this decision.”

But the Thousand Dragon had more to say.

Someone had once arrived just barely in time for her, so she honestly spoke about what she had felt when that Iberian Orc had stood bravely before her.

“It cannot have been a mere coincidence that I arrived in time for you. I would call it a miracle that you are still alive now.”

That was enough.

She needed no other reason to lend a helping hand.

As the white Succubus considered how she was to scale the towering wall that was the Thousand Dragon, the dragon swung her tail over. She lifted the Succubus up and onto her back.

And then her massive wings gathered the wind.

Just as the greatest Mandragora broke through the rubble and poked her head out into the open air, she released the scream that was meant to kill criminals.

But to avoid falling victim to that legend, the Thousand Dragon sent explosive masses of air in every direction that whipped up a storm of rubble and gears as if to harass the humans some more. And the reaction to that downward blast launched the Thousand Dragon high into the blue sky.

Part 11

Once the Break News's cry ended, Beatrice's group slowly resumed moving and got up.

Beatrice used her fire explosive Magic to send her voice to the black dragon flying high in the sky.

"Nice one!! Take her away from the island of Grandnir! A Mandragora is rooted to the ground, so she can't go out to sea. Use your wings to leave the island and she can't follow!!"

Gruagach, the Religious Society woman in a veil and Western mourning clothes, clicked her tongue.

She glared at the pile of rubble instead of at the Thousand Dragon or Succubus.

"Ileana!! Don't let up the attack! What do you think we're using you for!?"

The response came from an extremely directional voice that worked much like radio.

"It doesn't matter to me, but try thinking about where you want to send me. There are two options: I can pursue the fleeing dragon or I can continue suppressing the inn town."

If she ended her attack on the inn town, everyone taken out by the surprise attack would begin a counterattack against the Religious Society. The positions of the minority and majority would swap and the Religious Society would be the weaker party.

If they let the Thousand Dragon escape, the Succubus would escape the island and their reach. And they were up against a Break News. It was

highly doubtful if even a unit of the Religious Society's elites could bring that down.

And with all that in mind, Gruagach gave an immediate answer.

"Very well. You pursue the dragon."

"Hah hah! So you're focusing on your initial goal even if it exposes you to the risk of being ganged up on!? Interesting, but don't forget that you're my sacrifice. Don't get yourself killed."

A section of the ground twinkled like the starry sky.

By the time the Thousand Dragon realized they were Magic arrows fired into the sky by the humans of the Religious Society, dozens and even hundreds of colorful arcs passed right by her side. No, she had quickly twisted out of the way, but a few of them had still stabbed into her by pushing through the gaps in her thick scales. They were like flying snakes. They would alter their course to pursue the Thousand Dragon.

She could strike back at the surface, but she could not remain focused on the humans. The Break News named Ileana would be here soon and gaining as much distance from her was the dragon's top priority.

"Heh heh."

She was clearly being pecked at by a much lower opponent.

But the dragon still laughed with the white Succubus on her gigantic back.

"?"

"Yes, yes. I finally understand. I was only ever pretending before. I was nowhere close to truly helping someone like Boo Boo does."

The dragon's words grew louder and louder.

Finally, they became a definite roar that reverberated across Grandnir.

"But I understand now. You don't need logic when it comes to saving people. There's no reason to trap it all inside prearranged arguments! Yes!! Protecting someone makes you feel so light, so refreshed, and so proud!!!!!!"

Part 12

"What a pain..."

Just outside Boo Boo's leaf house on the mountainside, Sutriona of the Break News put her hands on her hips and sighed.

"I've never seen her let loose like this. It makes me question why we bother holding back."

"What is it, Sutriona? These will be cooked soon. If they're just going to burn otherwise, I'll eat them all myself."

"Ah! No fair, Boo Boo! I want to eat those Crab Dumplings too!!"

After blowing on them, the two of them ate a late lunch. Boo Boo had killed a giant Bomb Chicken and thus had enough food for several days, but the Fairies had sent him a plentiful supply of fresh water Riverbed Crabs and they had started on those first. After all, seafood spoiled quickly, so they had to eat it soon.

"I think I'll try eating vegetables because Beatrice said I should."

"Oh, how responsible of you."

"You need to eat them too, Sutriona."

“You don’t get to force that onto others! Ahh! Don’t pile a bunch of them onto my plate, Boo Boo!!”

Sutriona grew somewhat tearful, but she seemed to be the type to eat everything on her plate. She complained but kept eating.

“By the way, Boo Boo, do you know about the Religious Society?”

“Yes, the Fairies left a note. It said to watch out for the Religious Society.”

“As long as you understand that. ...But I wish there was a smoother connection between what they want and what they claim to want or between their doctrines and their interests. I’ve heard they made a previous attempt to monopolize the Experience Points by taking over the casinos that deal in so many gears. Although that apparently fell apart due to the trouble caused by some crazy gambler and some queen of the battle arena.”

“What are you trying to say?”

Boo Boo tilted his head, so Sutriona continued while wrapping a Crab Dumpling in a leaf vegetable.

“They keep shouting about religious confusion and the danger of Grandnir’s first new religion returning to their world, but none of it fits their actions if you look behind the curtain. They essentially want to be the unrivalled leader of online shopping in this world of swords and magic.”

“Hm?”

“No, I suppose you wouldn’t understand that analogy. Boo Boo, you’ve visited the Labyrinth with Beatrice’s group, right?”

“It isn’t easy because I get so hungry. Squeal. It’s weird how there aren’t any living things down there. There’s plenty of water and air, though.”

“Look at it the other way and that means you can’t enter the Labyrinth without preparing first. In addition to food, you have to bring magnets, rope, lights, and various Mixing ingredients. Even if clothing and sleeping gear is mostly handled with Magic, entering the Labyrinth with nothing is essentially suicide. ...So by taking care of that, they hope to control the very act of exploring the Labyrinth.”

The girl in a black ribbon dress stuffed a Crab Dumpling into her mouth.

“The inn town is a lot like a collection of independent shops. They each carry around and sell whatever product they specialize in. It’s a primitive and wholesome form of economic activity. But what happens if someone brings in the knowhow of a franchise? They apparently plan to let their manpower do the talking, have people posted at certain intervals within the Labyrinth, and carry in the needed products with something like a bucket relay. The Labyrinth changes periodically, but by setting up a rotation, they can ensure a hole does not form even as they let people take rests or return.”

If Beatrice had been here, she might have spoken up.

The Guild training she had seen in the forest had been for carrying products swiftly and safely through the Labyrinth with its unstable footing and all its Gimmicks and Traps.

“It sounds like a convenient service at first, but humans will stop preparing properly at the inn town if they lose that sense of danger. They’ll know they can resupply in the Labyrinth if they need to, after all. But the Religious Society is still an organization with its own interests. If they fake an accident and cut off the delivery when someone is truly in need, they can isolate them in the Labyrinth and effectively kill them. ...While some of it is still

left up to chance, they will still be able to put together a probabilistic murder plan.”

She did not stop speaking there.

Even after all that, there was still more to say.

“If a unified and popular group arrives, the individual shops of the inn town won’t stand a fighting chance. They’ll be closing shop and going out of business in no time, so the supply of goods will all come from the same source. A truly monstrous organization will rule everything.”

“Squeal? What does that mean???”

“Oh, was that too difficult for you? Basically, one person will control all the water and food, so anyone they don’t like won’t be able to get a single drop to drink. Once that happens, the ability to freely explore the Labyrinth will be no more than a dream. Everyone will be forced to accept a schedule convenient to the Religious Society. And the same goes for acquiring the Pieces that can distort human society. The Religious Society will have built up the ultimate dictatorship that allows them bend human society to their will.”

Boo Boo tilted his head.

And he spoke honestly.

“It’s wrong to keep everything to yourself.”

“Very true. But convenience is the sweetest of poisons. You know it’s bad for you, but you can’t ween yourself off of it. And no one’s going to boycott them when the slightest failure to prepare means death. Boo Boo, it’s just like how you’ve learned to enjoy the flavor of cooked meat despite fearing fire so much.”

“Boo.”

The Iberian Orc groaned and poked at the fire with a stick. Along with the firewood, he had thrown on one of the blocks of solid fuel from the vegetable stand, so the fire was more stable than usual.

The long silver-haired girl in a black ribbon dress smiled honestly.

“That is what the Religious Society...no, what *whoever controls them* wants to do. By fully franchising the exploration preparations, they probably hope to win over or intimidate any influential individuals or groups. That would be why they had a problem with the Circle Church that acted as an intermediary for Mixing jobs. That said, burning down your field because you hate the birds pecking at your crops hardly seems like a sane reaction. It makes me wonder if whoever it is has as tight a hold on the Religious Society’s reins as they think they do.”

Sutriona explained all that while munching on her late lunch.

She licked off her thumb as she continued.

“Now that I’ve eaten, I’ll be leaving.”

“Hm? You’re leaving?”

“That Thousand Dragon is flying around with the white Nun on her back. And the Religious Society has sent out Ileana, another Break News. I really don’t care that much about them, but as I said at the beginning: I’ll directly crush anyone who violates my territory.”

“Squeal. Everyone needs to stop fighting.”

“I couldn’t agree more, but sometimes you have to butt heads in order to make sure they don’t continue with the pointless fighting. And, Boo Boo, what will you do? It somewhat bothers me that Beatrice’s group is running

around trying to put out this fire, but there's no real reason for you to get involved."

"Hm." The Iberian Orc blew on a Crab Dumpling to cool it down. "I understand that all the Break News are dangerous. I don't want to fight one if I don't have to."

"Yes, an admirable viewpoint. That's the proper fear and respect you should have for higher beings like us."

Sutriona stood up with an oddly elderly-sounding groan of effort. She reached her small hands toward the butt of her skirt, but she decided not to brush it off when she saw Boo Boo was still eating.

"I will protect my territory, so you stay here, Boo Boo. But if you see Ileana, run away immediately. Don't worry about your household tools. The forest might wither around you, but that's just how it is. Don't panic and don't cause a scene."

"Boo? What do you mean???"

"That plant Break News is a Mandragora. If she gets serious, she can produce incredible power, but its source is the nutrients in the soil. In other words, she absorbs it all. I'd like to take her out as quickly as possible so she doesn't have a chance to do so, but I can't guarantee that will work out."

Boo Boo looked around with a Crab Dumpling in hand.

The birds chirped and a butterfly flew calmly over his head as he spoke.

"I'd be in trouble if the forest went away. I wouldn't be able to eat."

"I'll do my best."

Those miraculous words were saying she could guarantee nothing and yet was asking for his unconditional trust.

But that miracle did not work on Boo Boo.

“What is Ileana trying to do by making the forest wither? Does she like fighting that much? Did that Nun do something really bad? She spoke to me without being afraid when I ran across her in the forest.”

“I don’t know.” Sutriona sounded exasperated and she put her hands on her hips. “There are a lot of different Break News, but the reason for her actions are found in something beyond words and intellect. She wields violence when asked...so does that make her a pure mercenary? She seems to have been hired by the Religious Society this time, but that would mean they’re supplying her with some kind of reward she considers valuable.”

“Is it something she needs to eat?”

“She’s a plant, so she can live just by bathing in the sunlight and sticking into the soil. So I’m betting this is a form of entertainment or amusement. She has a complex about the food chain, so she does tend to mistake higher life forms for life’s excesses. ...I don’t know what exactly their contract entails, but I’m betting it has to do with women.”

“...”

Boo Boo stopped moving.

He stared at his half-eaten Crab Dumpling with a troubled look on his face.

“Boo. You mean Ileana is being mean to the Nun when she has no reason for it? And there’s still more once it’s over?”

“On top of that, she’s trying to bring down the interfering Thousand Dragon, sweep Beatrice’s group away, and kill the forest in this area. Well,

we're all paradoxes, so acting logically wouldn't suit us. Even if she does profit from all the damage, it's the damage itself that truly suits her."

That was as far as she got.

Boo Boo started scarfing down the remaining food and then he grabbed the object next to him: his Shining Weapon. He swung down what looked like a log or steel beam and he extinguished the fire with it.

Then he stood up.

"I'm going too."

"Mind if I ask why?"

"I heard that Nun was the one that made swimsuits for Beatrice and the others. Without that, we couldn't have spoken with Kallikantzaros and we might not have made it in time for the Cat Sith and Cu Sith incident. I thought I wouldn't be able to speak with her while she was in the human inn town, but that's different now. I don't want anything to happen to her before I can say thank you. And if this isn't necessary for someone to eat, then I want to stop it. Also," he added. "It's too late for me. I heard that everyone from the village was killed in a purge of Nonhumans. But this is different. I can still reach the Succubus whose life is going to be taken for a reason besides living or eating."

"Hmph," snorted Sutriona.

She did not seem to like something about that.

"You need to be more straightforward. Just say you're pissed with Ileana's violence so you're gonna go kick her ass."

"Boo?"

But Boo Boo tilted his head at that.

Not even the Fairy Queen had expected that reaction, so he clarified.

“I don’t hate Ileana. I just want to stop her if I can.”

This time.

This time, the long silver-haired girl in a black ribbon dress really did feel her mind go blank.

“Hwa ha.”

And she laughed.

It was entirely out of place, but Sutriona laughed uproariously on the front line of this battle.

“Ha ha ha!! Interesting! Now that I like! The long life brought by my position as the strongest can get boring, but I can never give up on life because it never fails to hit me with these *pleasant betrayals*!! Fine, Boo Boo. I will let you take the lead this time. Order me around and show me something outside the pre-established harmony.”

“Right.”

Boo Boo held his giant Shining Weapon in hand, licked his thumb, and looked to the battlefield.

He looked to the pitch black dragon flying in the blue sky.

“First, I need a way to get there.”

Part 13

The Succubus in a pure white habit rode the pitch black dragon through the sky.

The dragon's course took her straight across the island, but she could not make a rapid course correction. The immense Gs would make the Nun suffer and a great number of glowing arrows pursued them from behind. She wanted to avoid lowering her speed if at all possible.

As a hail of glowing arrows was fired from the surface, several of them pierced her body and wings, but none of them came close to fatal. Even if they were coated in poison, her body was over 1000 meters long. Since a chemical's lethal dose was generally calculated based on body weight, the amount on an arrow would never bring her down.

But that was only true of her body.

The arrows piercing her began to move in order to tear into her mentally.

The 4 feathers on the top, bottom, left, and right formed a cross. Power resided within them and they vibrated to speak with clear voices.

"Kill the witch."

"Tear out the heart of the witch who pretends to do good while sowing the seeds of evil."

"Tear apart any who assist her."

"Kill them."

"Once her vile seed has been planted in someone, there is no saving them. Kill them all!!"

The Succubus bit her lip.

But before she could say anything, the Thousand Dragon roared.

“You call yourselves allies of justice!? You call yourselves teachers of the truth!? Can you not see this girl holding back tears after having her home taken from her!? Can you not see the wounds in her heart!?”

“...”

So the Nun said nothing.

She simply placed a hand on the dragon’s scales and gently snuggled up against them.

And then.

“Kssh! How valiant of you, Weakest. Did the concept of chivalry catch your interest in your contact with human knowledge?”

The voice coming from the arrows clearly changed.

And the Thousand Dragon only knew one type of person who would call her “Weakest”.

“My brethren!?”

“Calling me that is something of an insult. And you’re also looking in the wrong direction. I’m over here.”

Something flashed.

It was not the human inn town behind them. It came from the exact opposite direction: the snowcapped peak of one of the mountains the dragon was fast approaching.

“What...? So fast! How!?”

The Succubus gasped, but the 1000-meter dragon did not wait around.

She opened her mouth wide and used her ultra-pressurized water breath to slice through her target along with a mountain peak.

It was cut down to size.

The spear piercing the heavens had its tip broken off and the Thousand Dragon passed just barely above what remained.

She was confident she had finished off whoever it was.

“Kssh. Well, then. I’ll admit that was impressive.”

“What...? But how!?”

“I didn’t think you could pull off that breath without any kind of water supply. Then again, if Grandnir had to supply your giant body with water, it would dry up in no time flat. It was possible you would run afoul of the seafood expert if you went out to sea, but this means you don’t have to hang around the land. You’re raising a full set of a Fire Spirit Salamander, Water Spirit Undine, Wind Spirit Sylph, and Earth Spirit Gnome inside your belly, aren’t you? And they give you an endless supply of energy. When you feed, it’s really just feeding them. That’s pretty well thought out. And if you use a fair bit of your *fuel*, can you raise a barrier against any of the Elements?”

The giant dragon felt shock and confusion.

And a moment later, a great shaking reached her head and inner ear.

“Gah...!?”

“Can you hear me, Weakest? Surely you didn’t think I qualified as a Break News just because I could send out some deadly sound waves.”

A great number of invisible spears of sound targeted the black dragon.

Yes.

“I am a Mandragora. As a plant Break News, I am at the very bottom of the food chain.”

“ ... ”

“But if plants are only eaten, how is it they never die out and even cover the entire surface? Is the tiny mind in that giant body enough to figure that one out?”

“ ...!!!???”

The Religious Society was no comparison.

The land of Grandnir stretched out below. Lights flashed equally from across the entire island.

That carpet of stars all concentrated into a single point of power.

That light signaled the Mandragora’s preparations to attack.

The Break News’s ultra-high frequency spears were approaching!!

The Thousand Dragon could not even hear her own roaring voice.

Her mind was too confused to even worry about the Succubus on her back. She lost balance in midair, her altitude dropped, and she entered a giant tailspin.

“All of Grandnir’s herbs are born from an All-Purpose Seed and our flowers and fruits differ depending on the water, soil, and other environmental factors. If a wise man grows us, we will become a miracle potion. If a common man grows us, we will become a mere weed.”

All the while, only the calm and composed woman's voice rang through the dragon's mind.

"I will praise you for one thing, Weakest. *I turned out quite well when I grew from your own fattened flesh and blood.*"

"You...!?"

Ileana could multiply any number of times.

That was the strength of plants and how they presented themselves to the world.

An odd sound burst out.

It came from one of the glowing arrows fired by the Religious Society. The arrowhead had not contained Magic or poison. It had only contained a small seed. That had pierced the dragon's skin, split her scales, and planted itself to absorb her flesh and blood.

And it grew.

Perhaps because she had grown from a black dragon, she had eternally dark skin that glistened like polished obsidian and her hair was a blazing red. A woman wearing a dress made of plant vines split the Thousand Dragon's scales and skin as she was born into the world.

Trying to shake her off was a futile task. And Mandragoras had a well-known trait.

When they were pulled from the ground, their scream would remove the souls of all who heard it.

As the white Nun stared wide-eyed, she was within the lethal range.

A sticky smile appeared on Ileana's lips as she took a deep breath.

The scream was coming.

But just before it did...

“You did well to last this long. Now leave the rest to me.”

Everyone’s eyes widened when they heard that.

A large, fat body sliced through the air and passed right by the Thousand Dragon’s head.

“Boo Boo...!!”



There was no need to respond with words.

He continued on through the air and arrived between the white Nun and Ileana. Unable to stop his momentum, he continued on toward Ileana with the force of an artillery shell.

A Shining Weapon that could be mistaken for a log or steel beam swung toward her gut and released all the air it had built up.

“Tch!! A Nonhuman? How did you get all the way up here!?”

“That’s none of your concern.”

He swung the large Shining Weapon around and pointed at her with its flat tip.

He had never seen one, but he looked something like a slugger as he made an announcement in a low voice.

“I came here. I arrived in time. I don’t care if it’s a purge of Nonhumans or what; I will never let you kill for anything other than living or eating. I will not let you have the Nun.”

“An endangered species has no right to speak to a paradox with a soul.”

“I eat a lot. Boo, so if you don’t want to get chewed on, get lost, vegetable.”

“...Oh? You have quite the mouth on you, I’ll give you that.”

The woman who looked like polished obsidian let out a slow breath.

A crimson light burned in her eyes alone.

“Then have a taste of death. My slight pity for your past has been washed away by my overflowing anger. I am Ileana, one of the Break News as well

as the greatest Mandragora. I will consume your foolish corpse once it has been returned to the dirt!”

Part 14

“Hm.”

The Break News girl with long silver hair and a black ribbon dress looked up into the blue sky with her hands on her hips.

Next to her, a device resembling a giant wooden spoon was fixed to a seesaw-like joint and attached to sturdy plant vines.

“It looks like the catapult worked,” said Sutriona.

The catapult was a siege weapon that used the elasticity of rope or vines to throw large rocks long distances. It was a historical weapon from a time before firearms. And the military Guild named Elkiad had already proven that firearms could be created with the materials available in Grandnir.

Thus, it made sense that a more primitive weapon could also be made. Sutriona had possessed the knowledge from overhearing the humans at the inn town, and the Fairies had showed their skill in building it.

Also, the Gold Vein District known for its casinos had several gigantic darts used to hit large circles. They had been originally developed as projectile weapons meant to protect the inn town from Break News, but that research had failed spectacularly and only the game remained.

But as the palm-sized Fairy named Meridiana fluttered around, her face grew pale.

“Ah wa wa, ah wa, ah wa. Boo Boo is really flying! This is like something from a children’s picture book!!”

"I made sure to do all the calculations in advance. A human would have been smashed to pieces by the shock of launching them, but he's the one who survived being lifted 1000 meters into the air in less than a second in his fight with the Thousand Dragon."

And the Thousand Dragon's great size was not the only problem.

The forest stirred around them.

"She's coming to us? Saves me the trouble of tracking her down."

The tone of Sutriona's voice changed.

Red wings of blood grew from the back left bare by her ribbon dress.

"Don't think you can just leave after entering my territory."

She was answered from multiple locations.

The women who grew up from the ground around her had various skin colors: red, blue, yellow, green, etc. They were probably each a Mandragora with a different toxic or medicinal effect.

"Don't think you can escape either. The ground and all that lives in it belong to me. Don't get so full of yourself when you are supported by me. You should bow your head. I will teach you the proper order of things."

"Be that as it may, a plant that simply absorbs the soil's nutrients and does no one any good is still known as a weed."

Meridiana cowered down from the scorching change to the air, but the Fairy Queen smiled fearlessly.

"Do you want to be exterminated? Your botanical traits change depending on the water, soil, and other environmental factors. That means you have no way of surviving if my red sandstorm of madness envelops everything. If

you don't want to end up a pitiful plant that can't produce a single flower, I suggest you leave now. Then I will overlook you."

"True. If you could do that." Plant Dress Ileana's attitude did not change.

"But can you really decide to turn all of Grandnir into a toxic swamp? The contamination level of your wings grows as they spread. In other words, it grows as the battle progresses. And not in a direct proportion either. I'm talking about a quadratic curve. Use your wings for an instant and the contamination will naturally break down in about 3 days, but if you continue for an hour or a full day, the half-life grows almost endlessly. By the time you have fully erased me from every part of the island, you will have created a land of death that will remain contaminated even 50 years down the line. You too are a paradox. You can do it, but you will not. Or am I wrong? After all..."

"..."

"You also did nothing when it came to the Thousand Dragon. If you had wanted to, you could have neutralized her with your red poison storm, but you hesitated because you could not even guess how far the intoxicated dragon's rampage would spread. And what happened as a result? You simply watched as so many of the Fairies that adore you were devoured. Your decision to protect them led you to let them die. ...You can do nothing. Unlike a plant that has no means of doing anything, you are unable to do anything specifically because you stand at the top of the pyramid. The title of the strongest is effectively only for show."

Sutriona was an adult.

So she did not interrupt and heard that long speech through to the end.

And then she smiled and responded with a lady's courtesy and a queen's grace.

"I'll rip you in half, you perverted carrot."

Part 15

An Iberian Orc and the greatest Mandragora faced each other on the back of a 1000-meter dragon. Ileana's weapon was her killer soundwaves that carried overwhelming destructive force. If she sent them in every direction, they were impossible to dodge. If she focused them on a single point, they could break through any shield or wall so her fingertips of death could reach her target's ears. The one way to dodge it was to break the sound barrier, but that exception was not an option here.

Simply put, plant dress Ileana had an overwhelming advantage.

Boo Boo could only swing around his Shining Weapon like a log or steel beam, so he could not dodge or defend.

Or so it seemed.

But a far too solid blow overturned all those assumptions.

"Ah...?"

Just as Ileana released her cry, she was so caught off guard that she aborted the invisible spear attack.

As the white Nun listened from behind Boo Boo, it felt like the sound grew distorted.

Boo Boo had done this.

More specifically, it had been the wind produced by his Shining Weapon. Sound could not travel without a medium such as water or air. That meant

it was influenced by that transmission medium. For example, if the air was compressed, the wavelength would also change. This killer soundwave was limited to an extremely delicate frequency, so this threw it into utter disarray. The ultra-high frequency waveform collapsed and the spear broke. Of course, this was only possible if one could predict where the invisible sonic spear would be.

“Tch!!”

She fired a 2nd and 3rd spear with her cry.

But neither of those hit Boo Boo either. Just before they did, he swung his Shining Weapon and compressed the air to destroy and blow away the spear.

“It’s no use. Your attacks can’t reach me.” His voice sounded almost dismissive. “And my heart isn’t afraid of a coward who only uses projectiles from a distance. The Thousand Dragon did not hesitate to clash with everything she had, so she was much stronger.”

“Perhaps so.”

Ileana did not stick with her failed plan.

Because she was so powerful, she immediately recognized this was not working.

So...

“But have you forgotten that we aren’t standing on the ground here!?”

Down below, Grandnir twinkled like a starry sky.

A reverse downpour of spears seemed to rebel against the laws of the world as they were launched from earth to heaven.

But those ultra-high frequency attacks were not targeting Boo Boo.

Their target was the “ground” they stood on: the Thousand Dragon.

“!”

The dragon ground shook, her mountain-like muscles writhed, and the people on her back were launched into the air.

“Kyah!”

The Succubus screamed as she was tossed about, so Boo Boo immediately grabbed her slender hand.

They were already within range of Ileana’s attacks. She shined like obsidian and maintained her fearless smile even as she was thrown into the air with them.

“Your attacks only display their true power when you can plant your feet on the ground and place your body weight behind them. But my killer soundwaves only require me to gather strength in my gut and turn my head. Can you maintain your true power like this?”

He needed to strike the air with all his might to compress it enough to function as a shield.

Any less and the Mandragora’s scream would pierce through.

It would pierce through and destroy Boo Boo’s brain.

“I have no fear. Now crash down to the ground, helpless and unconscious, last of the Iberian Orcs!!”

The attack of death was released.

Boo Boo had no hope of victory without any footing.

But that desperate situation suddenly changed.

With a roar of wind, the Thousand Dragon's tail swung toward Boo Boo.

It was only a tail, but in human units, it was several hundred meters long.

She may have been making an ultra-massive attack more than providing him with footing. This collection of mass, speed, and kinetic energy could easily wipe out a great many stone buildings if it was swung through the inn town.

But Boo Boo accepted it.

He accepted that footing and this final chance provided by the dragon even as she clenched her teeth from the pain of the killer soundwaves.

He accepted those feelings, that kindness, and that strength.

“What!?”

Plant dress Ileana cried out in surprise, but Boo Boo no longer bothered responding with words.

He planted his feet on the tail, placed plenty of strength in his Shining Weapon, and blew away her killer soundwaves. He then twisted his body and sent his great weight flying with tremendous force while still holding the Succubus in one arm.

And he flew toward something.

Yes, he was making his next attack!!

With an explosive sound, obsidian-skinned Ileana crashed down to the ground like a meteor.

Boo Boo expelled all of his kinetic energy and was tossed back out into the air.

The Thousand Dragon twisted around in midair and caught him and the Succubus.

“Boo Boo, it isn’t over yet. There are still lots of Ileanas on the ground. We need to escape to the ocean! I can pour on the speed, so hold onto the Succubus and don’t let go! If you’re supporting her, I can fly faster than-...!!”

Her hurried voice suddenly ended.

Boo Boo and the Succubus tilted their heads and the massive dragon spoke a question.

“What...is that? The twinkling lights of the Ileanas are disappearing...?”

Part 16

Come to think of it, what were Holy Swordswoman Beatrice, White Witch Filinion, and Fighter Priest Armelina doing during all this?

“All done!!”

The section of the Gold Vein District near the church had been reduced to a pile of rubble.

Armelina shouted that report as she swung around a spiked metal ball attached to a steel staff with a thick chain. People were collapsed all around her. The Religious Society assassins in their Western mourning clothes and veils had all been knocked out as a storm of direct physical violence passed through.

This was not just a metal ball.

The Magic metal ball would smash anything in its path. Then the bricks, stone pavement, stone pillars, arched gates, and everything else would stick to it as rubble. With each swing, it grew larger. The more it destroyed, the more unmanageable the ultra-heavy storm named Armelina grew. At this point, not even a building's outer wall could stop it.

But at that moment, Armelina heard an explosive blast and felt heat rush toward her. It prickled her skin like countless pins.

She shut one eye, held her hair down with a hand, and looked over to see a mass of scarlet flames.

Beatrice lightly swung her skinny rapier-like Shining Weapon.

She produced a hail of nonlethal attacks that used shockwaves and oxygen deprivation. She was a reliable ally, but Armelina silently prayed she would never have to face that fearsome girl.

"I've finished over here too. That takes care of most of the humans."

"You really are cruel. It doesn't matter if they're in a building or behind a shield with you..."

"I don't want to hear that from someone whose demolition ball sends them and their shield flying."

Not only had those level cap fighters joined the battle, but it became readily apparent that the Religious Society's forces were very unbalanced. Their Shining Weapons were Western bows with a stabilizer and close-range knives attached. It of course depended on what Magic they had learned, but the concept had been obvious from the beginning. The knives were obviously meant to make up for their deficiency in close-range combat, so Beatrice's group had moved in close and beaten them to a pulp.

With the Break News-level killer soundwaves gone, those level cap fighters were simply powerful.

“Huh? Where’d Filinion get off to?”

“There’s nothing for her to do here.”

They showed off an absolute superiority in power that implicitly said they did not need a healer.

“This is that Mixing-obsessed girl we’re talking about. She’s probably indulging in that bad habit of hers again.”

In her plant dress, an Ileana clicked her tongue all alone within the rustling forest.

She looked up at the blue sky through the trees. She could see a 1000-meter dragon calmly carrying away her target.

(The seed fired onto the Weakest has been eradicated. I would order another arrow fired up there, but the Religious Society is not responding. Can I bring them down with only my surface-to-air attacks? My target will escape out to sea if I can’t!!)

“Is this any time to be looking away, perverted carrot?”

“Kh.”

A pair of shining eyes stared at her from beyond the trees.

“I don’t even need to use my toxic wings. My hands are enough to break a vegetable in two and return it to the ground as fertilizer. All the nutrients you’ve absorbed from the ground will be returned using your body. A weed like you needs numbers in the thousands or tens of thousands to

make an impact, so did you really think you could stand up to someone who reigns as a paradox with just one of me?"

"You're nothing but a bug that can only lap up a flower's nectar and chew at a tree's fruit!!"

With the juicy sound of a root vegetable breaking, that specific Ileana's consciousness was erased.

Elsewhere, an Ileana of a different coloration and a different variety spat on the ground at losing one of her viewpoints.

She could push back using her numbers for a war of attrition, but that was not what she had to focus on now.

(I can't waste time on every little bug. Just like a venomous moth, if I send a few units after her, she'll happily devour them. And whatever might happen, I've already made the contract. I need to accomplish my real goal while she's focused on the decoys.)

Plants did not move on their own. They instead manipulated their surroundings using the color and aroma of their flowers.

In addition to directly having them carry pollen or seeds, they would also drive off harmful insects by attracting another insect that hunted the first kind.

"Dance, lowly bug. Dance upon your false victory."

Plant dress Ileana laughed scornfully as she swiftly withdrew from the front line.

Ileana's mind suddenly vanished into oblivion.

“...Ah!!!???”

Elsewhere, another Ileana widened her eyes at losing a viewpoint.

Sweat would not stop pouring down her body. She was breathing heavily and she could not restrain the intense palpitations of her heart.

What had that been?

It had not been Sutriona's forest rampage. Nor had it been the Iberian Orc on the dragon's back. But who else could annihilate even one of Ileana's units?

And that attack.

It had been like the jaws of a great predator. It had reminded her that she was a plant through and through and that she was at the very bottom of the food chain. Who could pull off an attack like that?

She heard rustling leaves behind her.

She did not have time to turn around.

Ileana's mind suddenly vanished into oblivion.

“Kh!!”

Elsewhere, another Ileana groaned through tense lips as she realized she had lost another one of herself.

That groan contained concern...no, it was definite fear by now.

Something was there.

Even after dying, Ileana had no idea what had caused it and this monster reminded her of a predator even though she was an overwhelming Break News.

She gradually caught on to what was happening. The great swarm of Ileanas was shrinking. They were being cut down quickly enough to give her a chill. The destruction did not cover Grandnir from one end of the island to the other, but the units in this forest had been nearly wiped out. The speed of destruction would give Sutriona's toxic wings a run for their money. And there was no noticeable sign of contamination. This targeted only Ileana and utterly annihilated her.

"It can't be..."

If this was possible, who could do it?

If this could happen, what was it?

"It can't be!!"

Ileana's mind suddenly vanished into oblivion.

"Bhah, wheeze, bhaha!!"

How much futile resistance did she attempt after that? Her viewpoints only continued to vanish.

The total amount of damage made her feel isolated. And the only Ileana remaining in the dark, dark forest felt her back bump into a tree trunk. She could not gather her thoughts. She needed to stay focused, lest she continue trying to walk backwards even with her back pressed against the tree.

Then the predator appeared before her.

It was a white witch with fluffy blonde hair and glasses.

“A...human...?”

Ileana was caught off guard, but she could not stop her cold sweat as she focused her wavering eyes on something: the Shining Weapon first aid kit that White Witch Filinion held like it was truly precious.

“A Mixing tool. Are you saying you’re remaking my body into recovery potions in real time!?”

“There’s an implicit understanding that we can’t take any plants or animals without a Nonhuman present, but I just can’t help myself when I see a rare material. I suppose you would call this poaching, so it’s such a bad habit.”

The witch giggled and the lenses of her glasses sparkled.

A frame of illusion Magic appeared next to her like an image floating in fog. It displayed the ingredient list for a recovery potion she could create by Mixing.

“And is it really that surprising? When you get down to it, you’re a Mandragora. With this recovery potion ingredient list and an environment that lets me calculate out such a list, boxing you up and turning you into a potion is not very hard at all. Mixing is the act of combining a few ingredients to create the Item you want according to equivalent exchange. No matter how solid it is, the original material would have to ‘disappear’ wouldn’t it?”

“...”

“That said, there’s nothing I can do without the ingredients on the list. After all, I’m Mixing you to create something new, not destroying you. So I can’t reach Suttriona if she flies high into the sky and I can’t Mix the Thousand

Dragon since I don't have an ingredient list to go with her. If I could just swallow anything up, I could insta-kill all of the Gimmicks and Traps in the Labyrinth. And I need to turn them into gears, so it just isn't that convenient."

Filinion then whispered the word "but".

The overwhelming enjoyment in her eyes had the look of a true predator.

A new frame appeared in the air and revealed Ileana's structure in no time.

It revealed her Status.

"Things are different with a Mandragora like you."

"...!!!???"

She did not wait any longer.

This went far beyond rattling the witch's brain. Plant dress Ileana sent out as many killer soundwave spears as she could and with enough force to fell all of the trees in their path.

The puny human body was instantly smashed to pieces.

Her torso was crushed, her upper body was cut away and torn apart, and her pitiful lower body remained standing as if it had forgotten to fall. Or that should have happened. In fact, it did happen.

However...

"Oh, dear. Have you already forgotten?"

"Wha-!?"

A new upper body grew back.

And then her Percentage-type Magic reappeared one piece of clothing at a time.

“This is an act of creation, not destruction. And I have been using Mandragoras large enough to be known as a Break News...*to create incredibly powerful recovery potions.*”

Ileana was speechless.

The frame floating next to Filinion provided the number of recovery potions she had in stock. It was unbelievably high. And that was not an upper limit. She could increase that number as much as necessary.

“Using recovery potions in quick succession builds up a resistance, but this one is so powerful that it’ll still work just fine even if its effects are cut in half.”

Not even the Vampire living on the beached ghost ship could regenerate this skillfully. Ileana’s foe had both the strongest weapon and an unbreakable shield. The more Filinion fought, the more recovery potions she would have. It was one-against-many, but Ileana could not imagine how she could win in a war of attrition.

“I have a suggestion.”

It was hopeless. There was nothing she could do.

She would only be consumed and consumed.

“There’s this thing called market price. I’d really rather avoid having too many Mandragoras caught because their value would crash despite the quality. *And since this is related to the eye drops that temporarily fix my vision, I would rather that market remained stable.* So let’s have you be the last one I

collect this time. ...Leave immediately. If you don't, I'll walk all around the island and turn you into a mysterious extinct flower. Got that?"

"...I remember now." Ileana gulped. "I remember now, human. The Religious Society told me about you. They gave me some information on a Holy Swordswoman, White Witch, and Fighter Priest that I needed to watch out for when attacking the inn town, but Beatrice or Armelina weren't the one they were most worried about. It was you: 'Anatomia Puzzle' Filinion. Because..."

"..."

"There's a rumor that you once *consumed another person in the Labyrinth and turned them into a potio-...*"

Ileana's mind suddenly vanished into oblivion.

"What a pain."

The White Witch reached into her first aid kit and pulled out a potion in a small rectangular bottle like one a mountain climber might carry to stay warm. Her voice returned to its usual tone as she sighed. She grabbed the bottle opening between her fingers and twirled it to swish the contents around. She was an expert at making recovery potions, so the bottle itself was a part of the potion. It was not much different from the candy beer bottles used for filming dramas.

"This potion is convenient, but it's a little *too* convenient." She sounded exasperated. "I'm pretty sure people would start fighting over it, so I either need to throw it out somewhere or bury it next to Boo Boo's garden when no one's looking."

She was only speaking to herself.

What mental state led her to say it aloud?

The witch simply spoke inside the dark forest that had forgotten to rustle its leaves.

“Silly people. How many times do I have to tell them that I only have the ingredient lists I’ve calculated out and that I can only consume the things on those lists? *Although things would be different if there was Magic that could turn a human into a potion.*”

Part 17

There were not many places for the Thousand Dragon to land. She ended up forcibly landing in the ocean along the beach (causing some chaos with the fairly tall waves that created) and allowed Boo Boo and the Nun to safely return to Grandnir.

It must have been possible to see the 1000-meter dragon from anywhere on the island because Beatrice was waiting for them.

Meanwhile, there was no sign of the Religious Society or Ileana who had been attacking them so persistently before.

“Don’t worry. Everyone cleaned it all up nicely,” said Beatrice. “We beat up the humans of the Religious Society. Sutriona was pissed at having her prey stolen from her, so the glasses cow is hiding in the forest somewhere, but it’s all over regardless. Ileana was dealt with too, so you don’t have to worry, Boo Boo.”

“?”

Boo Boo tilted his head, but he decided the danger must have passed if she said there was nothing to worry about.

“U-um...”

The Nun in a white habit hesitantly raised a hand.

“What should I do now?”

Her church had been destroyed, the Circles she had worked so hard to make had been trampled on, and the humans had chased her out of the inn town. That Succubus was persecuted and had lost her home, so she was asking if she would have to return to the forest.

But Beatrice smiled and shook her head.

“This was caused by the Religious Society, but they won’t be a problem now that we kicked their asses. I’m pretty pissed at the people in the inn town, but they won’t have a reason to randomly persecute you now that the Religious Society isn’t threatening them. So your normal life awaits you if you return. Assuming you want to go back, that is.”

“B-but I, um...”

She reached for the sides of the hood hiding her head.

She touched the horns hidden below.

The Holy Swordswoman sighed and immediately answered.

“Everyone already knew.”

“Eh!?”

“The people of the inn town knew, but they still accepted your Circles. So there really isn’t anything to worry about. They took a fair bit of damage too and the ones hit by Aleana’s killer soundwaves won’t be able to move for half a day at least. Humans really only travel back and forth between the inn town and the Labyrinth, so this was a pretty devastating blow. If

someone's willing to help them out, I don't see why they would reject them."

"..."

The Nun stared blankly at Beatrice for a while.

Her feelings had not been for nothing.

They had gotten through and reached the humans.

When she realized that, her expression gradually crumbled.

She gave a deep and grand bow and then she ran full speed toward the inn town.

"If the humans would have been less kind, I could have taken her for an ocean trip until the heat died down," said the Thousand Dragon.

Boo Boo responded without giving it any real thought.

It was such an obvious thing that it did not require worrying about.

"You don't need a reason. Some spare time is a good enough reason to give her a ride on your back."

Part 18

The Religious Society, Ileana, and the Thousand Dragon.

After a variety of fierce attacks, the buildings in one corner of the inn town had collapsed. It would have been a disaster had people had been buried by the ruins of the stone walls. Since most of the humans still could not move thanks to Ileana's killer soundwaves, it might take a while to find them. So Boo Boo and the others followed the Nun into the inn town.

Boo Boo's great strength came in handy at times like this.

The humans normally kept away from him due to his appearance, but as he easily lifted up the heavy rubble, the impressed people watched him from all around.

The search for victims also reached the church...or what remained of it.

Its walls had mostly crumbled into a pile of rubble after the Religious Society's attack. The pipe organ and pews were broken, but for some reason, the pulpit up front, a portion of the wall, and some of the stained glass had survived.

Boo Boo stopped working and looked up at the brightly colored window shining in the sunlight.

"What is it, Boo Boo?" asked Beatrice as she helped next to him.

"Well, it's my first time seeing a church."

The Holy Swordswoman smiled bitterly at that.

It was true someone raised in Grandnir would find it unusual.

"Do you know what this place is for?"

"The Nun told me in the forest. A church is where you ask god for things."

That was a little off, but that Nun had started this through mimicry.

The concept of prayer must have existed in Grandnir because he clasped his hands together as he continued.

"So I think I'll ask that you and I always get along."

"Eh?"

"During the fun times and the hard times, I want to be with you. Then I know everything will be fine and I won't have to worry."

“ ... ”

Promising that in front of god was basically the same as a certain ceremony, but Boo Boo would not be aware of that.

Beatrice blushed, frantically waved her hands around, repeatedly pressed her index fingers together in front of her chest, cleared her throat, stole glances at Boo Boo's eyes, and finally made up her mind.

“Y-yes. I too hope we can-...”

“And Filinion too.”

“What!?”

“And Armelina, and Meridiana, and Suttriona, and the Nun! If we all get along, nothing bad will happen when we're in trouble. We'll be able to overcome anything.”

Beatrice brought a hand to her forehead and slowly sighed.

But his prayer was so adorable that she could not get mad.

She changed her train of thought.

The Holy Swordswoman smiled a little and added to what he had said.

“That's right. I hope we can all get along and smile together.”

Part 19

“Now, then.”

It was all over.

And someone whispered somewhere.

“The preparations are complete. It’s time we got started.
Right...Gruagach?”



Filinion's Recovery Potion Mixing Text

Drop of a Spring Spirit (Over Grade)

Ingredients:

- Milk of the Milk Coconut: 2 Small Bottles
- Yellow Mandragora (Ileana-class): 1
- All-Purpose Seed: 2
- Salt: 1 tsp

Form:

- Mid-Size Bottle (Rectangular): Liquid Type

(The bottle holding it is a part of the potion. It won't work if you swap out the container, so be careful.)

Good For:

- 3-4 Days after Mixing is complete

Effects:

- When the owner's death is detected, the bottle shatters for an automatic recovery. The brain and heart are instantly and completely regenerated to their state when they were destroyed. It provides an estimated HP recovery of around +125,000, so there should be almost no wounds it cannot heal for a human. But it is unknown if it would work on a corpse that has already started rotting.

(Notes)

- The ingredient list is the same as the normal risk-avoidance recovery potions that are sold for 5 Large Fragrant Wood Gears. But this custom potion's superior effects come from the Mandragora's overwhelming power as a Break News. It probably can't resurrect someone from their skeleton, but since its incredible power could trigger bloody conflict, I intend to dispose of this and the sample.

Chapter 3: Reality Invading Heal Queen

Part 1

It was only a slight difference, but Armelina of course knew that delayed information could produce devastating results.

“Sorry. I’ll listen to your criticism later. Tell me what’s happening!”

“Chief!!”

She left through the Gate to Sign Out. When she returned to a corner of the city, she was a beautiful woman in glasses with her black hair tied back and wearing a tight skirt suit with the tie removed and the first few buttons undone.

This was not a specially cleared area in an expensive part of the city like the Detached Magic Palace in Roppongi or the Ushigashira Shrine in Akasaka. Nor was it a secret facility deep below the Metropolitan Police Department or the National Police Agency. After all, she and her coworkers did not work in public security or foreign affairs. They were an external sector that performed the investigation that could not be done through the official channels. They were officially known as a private detective agency staffed by retired police officers and JSDF officers.

She was below a rundown elevated railroad in Shinjuku.

She was inside a cold storage truck stopped there. Its refrigeration was of course turned off and it was stuffed full of steel racks, flat screen monitors, and computers with their internal power sources bypassed. A slight space was left cleared in the center. There was nothing physically there, but it was a crystallization of cutting-edge technology that qualified as a national secret. That was the fruit of their research and they could not let it reach

even their allied nations. It was still in development, but it was a mobile Gate that was not reliant on a specific location.

As the incident with the Religious Society showed, moving between Earth and Grandnir introduced a large informational risk. Grandnir had been known as spy heaven ever since the Cold War when the Americans and the Soviets were pointing nuclear missiles at each other. That risk could be somewhat reduced by monitoring the Gates on the Earth side, but the existence of mobile Gates would entirely overturn that assumption.

The other workers waiting in the truck began to speak.

“The situation could not be worse. You can call it unprecedented if you want. I imagine you already know since you performed an emergency unplanned Sign Out, but...*something has come out.*”

“So the information I got in Grandnir was right.”

The woman in the tight suit just about bit her thumbnail out of habit, but then she remembered she was in front of her subordinates.

Even so, she could not restrain her panic and irritation.

She was not entirely unconnected to this incident. While she had not caused it, she had helped lay out the fuse leading to the bomb.

She looked to one of the many flat screen monitors.

They showed the scene outside using the security cameras set up around the city. Black smoke was rising from multi-tenant buildings in Tokyo and innocent residents were fleeing along the sidewalk and roads alike.

“Despite the panic, order has been maintained. It is highly unlikely that this will lead to any moral hazards such as looting or rioting.”

“That isn’t what I was worried about.”

Yes, that was a concern, but it was secondary.

The real problem lay elsewhere.

“Gruagach...”

The tight skirt woman muttered the name of the woman who had been at the center of the Religious Society.

That alone would be completely normal. Just as this glasses woman went by the name of Armelina, everyone had a second identity when exploring the Labyrinth. There was nothing odd about the woman named Gruagach walking around Tokyo.

But the woman’s eyes narrowed sharply as she viewed the many monitors lining the wall.

“So your appearance really is the same as in Grandnir.”

People’s appearance changed between the 2 worlds because of the Percentage-style Magic that formed their clothing.

In other words, they could not maintain their Grandnir appearance when no longer in an environment that allowed for Magic. Or it should have meant that. But that was not what surprised the tight skirt woman the most. Another fact was so shocking that even that paled in comparison.

And that other fact was the primary problem.

“The Succubus...”

She had once worn a white habit.

But now that demon unnaturally embraced Gruagach from behind, pressed her cheek against the woman, and smiled thinly.

“So my information was right! She really has appeared here! But how!?”

What was going on?

The answer was found a bit earlier and in another world.

Part 2

It began in the inn town when the scars of destruction were still fresh.

Since most of the humans were unconscious, Boo Boo had visited despite normally being feared. He and Armelina were strong, so they moved the rubble to search for anyone buried alive. Filinion used a recovery potion on anyone they found.

Beatrice did not have much to do there, but she had another important job: tie up the unconscious members of the Religious Society and confiscate their Shining Weapons.

“You have no idea what you have done,” hoarsely said a woman in mourning clothes and a veil. “You let the witch escape. You assisted her. So whatever she might do now, what happens next is your responsibility. Are you prepared to go down in history as one of those who destroyed the world?”

“What are you talking about?”

“I’m asking if you are prepared. You will come to regret choosing to act based on your own spoiled emotions.”

She thought this was only the ravings of a lunatic.

She decided to ignore the woman and forget it all.

But when she looked up again, a slight – ever so slight – question occurred to her.

Yes.

“Where did the Nun go?”

Fairy Queen Sutriona stabbed something into the nutrient-rich garden next to Boo Boo’s leaf house near a mountain river.

“Hmph.”

“Ghah!!”

It was Ileana, the plant Break News and the greatest Mandragora who wore a dress made of grape leaves and vines. Technically, it was just one of her.

“Out of respect for what Boo Boo and the others accomplished, I’ll end this here. Heal your wounds there, perverted carrot.”

“Oh, what’s this? Now that I look at it, this land isn’t bad. To think that cursed Iberian Orc has a talent for preparing soil. It might not look nice, but I appreciate his love for the flowers. It’s so much nicer than some insects I could mention.”

“You can’t have him.”

“He doesn’t belong to you. Ahhhhh! Th-this is perrrrrrfect...”

Ileana cried out like she was soaking up to the shoulders in a hot spring that soothed ones weariness.

Her face grew flushed as she said more.

“But you truly are a troublesome insect. Thanks to your interference, the Religious Society has retreated. Now I won’t get my reward.”

“I’m sure it had to do with women, so I really don’t care.”

“You understand, don’t you?” Ileana giggled. “All I ask for a job is a virgin. But I don’t take her and devour her. I essentially call dibs to ensure no one else can touch her. I enjoy freeing them from the many bonds humans place on each other.

In this case, that was the Religious Society.

When someone said they could only live one way, she would show them there were other options. She would show them that they could get by just fine once they took that first step. That was how Ileana found her purpose in life.

Sutriona understood all that, but she still spat out the same thing.

“I don’t care. When you kill someone and save someone, are you cancelling out the death? That’s only your interpretation. Don’t be so naïve, mercenary. Don’t play the predator if you aren’t prepared to be eaten. At the very least, you could have followed a path of nonviolence and yet not lost anything at all, making you the envy of every pacifist.”

“Perhaps so. But at least let me wallow in regret. Gruagach was a truly unfortunate girl. The Religious Society alone would have been bad enough, but even her mental escape route was dyed in evil.”

“?”

By the time Sutriona tilted her head, a clear change had already begun.

The Nun in a white habit was gone.

When Boo Boo, Filinion, and Armelina heard that, they discovered another concern.

“One is missing,” said Beatrice. “I remember how many enemies I defeated and one of those women in mourning clothes is missing.”

“So the Nun and one of the Religious Society who were pursuing her are missing?”

“Squeal. Could this be really bad?”

“Wait, wait, wait. Don’t tell me she was taken away after all that.”

They had already been searching for anyone buried in the rubble, so they split up and resumed the search.

As Boo Boo moved the rubble out of the way, they eventually came to the ruins of the church.

“What is this?”

The roof was gone, most of the walls had collapsed, and nearly the entire building was only rubble, but a small area had survived.

It had likely been a tiny storage space hidden inside the pipe organ by the wall. It had broken apart, the lock was now useless, and its contents were exposed to Boo Boo.

There were several pieces of parchment inside.

Boo Boo did not know if they were valuable, so he showed them to Beatrice who looked shocked and began reading through them.

“It’s a lot like the notes used by a phone scam group... They follow these arrows to know what to say depending on what the other person says. It’s a flowchart for controlling someone’s heart.”

“Boo?”

Boo Boo did not seem to get it, but Beatrice decided it would be best for him if she did not explain it in more detail. Someone who had mastered a guide like this would not need it anymore. They would only keep it around if they had a plain form with fields to be filled in. They would investigate an individual and write down what they found to more effectively grasp their heart.

“But this is pretty complex and detailed. They must have had a specific target in mind from pretty early on. Boo Boo, you said you found this in the church? That would mean the Nun was manipulating some specific person.”

But who?

After some thought, she ran into an assumption they had made earlier.

“It’s possible the Religious Society woman didn’t abduct the Nun.”

“Beatrice, are you saying the Nun took the Religious Society woman away?”

The Holy Swordswoman thought for a moment.

She used her fire illusion Magic to draw out some frames and red lines and she felt faint at the great change she saw.

The overall structure was falling apart. It was being remade. What if the Nun and the Religious Society had been secretly connected even as they caused this entire incident? Had the Nun known about the attack in

advance? No, had she intentionally made herself the source of conflict to pull the trigger? That would mean she had planned for the Religious Society to bring in Ileana and to greatly damage the inn town.

But if so, what for?

What about the current situation helped her in any way?

“...”

“Beatrice?”

“No, it can’t be...”

A thought started to rise in the back of her mind, but she rejected it herself.

“She can’t. She just can’t. Even if it’s left wide open, it’s simply impossible...”

At that very moment, Beatrice turned toward Boo Boo with a look of utter disbelief in her eyes. Her eyes were opened as wide as they would go and the shock that raced through them was just like running into a field of unimaginable despair.

“What is it, Beatrice? Did I do something wrong?”

“No, it isn’t that...”

Technically, Beatrice was not looking at Boo Boo.

She was looking at what hung from his waist.

That giant Shining Weapon could be mistaken for a log or a steel beam.

And...

“Yes. That’s right. If a great number of Iberian Orc souls can be sealed inside a Shining Weapon...”

“?”

“Humans can pass through the Gates, but Nonhumans can’t. That’s an undeniable fact, but if those Nonhumans can change form, that assumption falls apart...”

Out of all the myriad possibilities, why had her thoughts jumped to that one?

There were two reasons.

First, it led to the greatest risk if accomplished.

Second, it explained why the Succubus would use the Religious Society woman to take out everyone in the inn town.

“If the Succubus was planning something this big, someone would have stopped her under normal circumstances. Every human in Grandnir would have dropped whatever they were doing and rushed her. She wouldn’t be able to accomplish her goal if that happened. The Sign Out process takes several minutes, so if we held every Gate, we could strike back while she was defenseless.”

The reality of this theoretical risk gradually grew inside Beatrice.

“But things are different now. The power of a Break News attacked the inn town and most of the humans in Grandnir are unconscious, so she can do anything now! Yes, like a final experiment for sending a demon to Earth!!”

The Holy Swordswoman dug through the pile of rubble some more.

She found plenty of documents and evidence.

Controlling a star student was quite easy.

The purity of their heart would lead them to eliminate any discrepancies between their ideal self and their actual self. It could be anything: looks, academics, athletics, income, job title, behavior, etc. As long as you discovered the source of their insecurities, you could drive them to a state of inextricable dependence.

“Uuh...”

The woman wore bluish-black mourning clothes and a veil.

She had a modest chest and her extremely long and whitish-blond hair still reached her waist despite being braided and bent into a U shape.

She was known as Gruagach.

She had once been a hound of the Religious Society who was entirely pure and fulfilled her missions like a machine, but once her fall began, it would not stop. The white Succubus clung to her back, wrapped her arms around the woman's neck, and rubbed her cheek against the woman's cheek, but the poor woman could only groan.

“I...I really was wrong. I shouldn't have done this. But...but I... Ahh! I should have immediately cast aside this power!!”

“But you cannot get rid of me now.”

It was like a gentle whisper.

The pure white demon had an angel's halo and she licked the woman's cheek with her long tongue as she sweetly whispered into her ear.

She had already revealed her identity and the habit was gone. With the clothes stripped away, her sexy body was only covered by a swimsuit-like garment made from reptilian scales and the thick white snake wrapped around her body like a *hagoromo*.

Her goat horns and bodylines had also grown larger and fuller. The Succubus intended to influence the earth, but she could not cross the boundary between worlds even if she did seal her soul inside a Shining Weapon. She would be blocked by the boundary between Grandnir and Earth, so she could only influence the other side as if through a thin layer of rubber.

But it did not matter either way.

If you knocked on a wall, it would make a noise. If you heated a glass panel with a burner, the other side could burn you. If you pressed a magnet against the underside of a thin film, you could control the metal nails on the other side. As long as she could influence the other side like that, the demon might as well exist on the other side. *Something* would stand there in a form that people's senses would detect.

And the group on the Grandnir side of the thin layer would never be able to capture the demon.

She would become something like a being that pressed against the outer edge of the ever-expanding universe. They would know she existed in the same world, but no one would be able to observe or reach her.

As long as this poor woman named Gruagach acted as the Succubus's anchor, anyway.

"After all, everyone will be after you now. You need more power than ever. So you have no choice but to follow my plan. If you don't, you'll be pecked at from every direction. You'll be left in an even sorrier state than a sugar cube dropped in front of an anthill. You don't want to turn out like that, do you?"

"..."

The president had grown beautiful.

She had shined each time she challenged the Labyrinth. The words of envy had echoed through her mind.

“Orrrr will you return to your former self? Would you prefer to be powerless, unable to even walk through the Labyrinth, and just one of the pitiful workers whose name no one remembers?”

“No!! Anything but that! I can’t go back to what I was like back then!!”

Gruagach shook her head half-madly.

It was not that she had no talent.

She was a Summon Hunter. That was a rare Job that let her bind contracts with the Nonhumans on the surface of Grandnir and either fill her blade with their power or directly summon them to fight within the Labyrinth. That Job was on the same level as a Holy Swordswoman, White Witch, or Fighter Priest.

But she had not had anywhere to use that talent.

In exchange for being able to summon any Nonhuman, she could not summon anything without binding a contract first. But strict Gruagach had been very poor at negotiating. And she had lacked the initial power needed to make a Nonhuman bind a contract by force. She had long been trapped in a state that was much like locking her keys in the car.

Once the Succubus had realized that, it had been easy to manipulate her.

She had lent Gruagach the use of a Succubus’s special Skill: Charm.

Gruagach had used that Charm to win over and bind contracts with more and more of the Nonhumans in Grandnir.

Yes, by covering her entire body with a light pink oil flavored by multiple herbs and the blood from the Succubus's wrist. And just as perfume bonded with the oils and moisture of the skin, the unclean blood had mixed in with the sacrifice. And that was one of the powers that would pull at the demon through the thin layer.

"This is just like the illness recovery tours. Even if objects and life forms can't be directly passed back and forth, the fact that your ailing body was healed will remain back in your world, right?"

Gruagach had quickly risen to the top of the Religious Society's ranks.

But that had all been based on the Succubus's assistance.

If the Succubus cut off her Skill, all of the Nonhumans trapped by her Charm would return to their senses. They would abandon their contract and leave Gruagach. If that happened, she would lose her power once more. She would be ruined. Gruagach's glory was entirely reliant on the Succubus.

She had soared high with that power, but that only increased the shock of the inevitable fall.

That led her fear to grow without end.

"Sob, hic. What are you trying to do?"

"What do you think I'm trying to do?"

"Answer me!! Why have you ruined...absolutely ruined my life!?"

"Because you had talent."

The Succubus faintly smiled, embraced the woman from behind, and ran her hands along the bodylines that showed through the mourning clothes.

No.

“You had talent for corruption. I mean, a normal person would have been overwhelmed by this point and made a mistake. They would have roused the others’ suspicions, had their identity revealed, and dropped out of the running.”

“Uuh.”

“Buuuut. You managed to deceive them all until now. No one suspected you were wearing something like this under those pretty clothes. This secret looks perfect on you, don’t you think? ☆”

“Uuuuhh...!!”

The Succubus moved slowly.

There should have been more than enough time to resist, but Gruagach could not.

The mourning clothes were stripped from the fully tamed woman’s body. So was the veil from her face. That clothing was technically Percentage-type Magic, so it dissolved into the air. And that left...

“My, my. This was originally a full set of armor and a man’s Shining Weapon, but as I gradually made the necessary modifications, the design dramatically changed. Well, this may just be a reflection of my own tastes. It makes it hard for the wearer to go out in public, doesn’t it?”

It was a blue and black set of light armor with something like a swimsuit’s pareo added on. That was not too rare in Grandnir, but it also had something like leather belts binding her body in places.

A red, glowing, and venomous needle was installed on the end of the tail that curved upwards from the back of her hips. Insect legs grasped her hips

from behind and two giant pincers with red tips pushed up on her modest chest from below.

Overall, it was reminiscent of a scorpion.

But the most ominous features were the keyholes at the points where the belts intersected. That suggested that the wearer could never remove it of her own free will.

It was a modified Shining Weapon. It ignored its wielder's will.

If she was wearing that Shining Weapon armor and had the Succubus's soul sealed inside her thanks to the herbal oil soaked into her soft skin, she would intentionally catch on the barrier between worlds. That would separate the demon from her sacrifice. And it would bring the large-horned Succubus as close as possible to the filter between worlds.

"Now, let us begin. You return through your Gate and my power will bind to your body through the thin layer. That will mean success and give us cause to celebrate."



“Khahh!?”

The star student had no choice but to fall, but when she tried to put up a futile resistance regardless, her entire body gave a violent jerk.

Just as the long scorpion’s tail rose behind her hips, it mercilessly stabbed into the sacrifice’s back.

It was like a plug and an earphone jack. The armor already had several coin-sized holes, and it stabbed into one of those.

Sparks burst before her eyes.

Her mouth flapped wordlessly, her eyes opened as wide as they could, and she took desperate and deep breaths. None of this changed anything. Just like someone growing accustomed to the heat or the cold, the star student’s mind adapted to this new state.

“Ahn.”

The translucent demon cried out like some kind of joke, but she was not teasing the victim.

She now shared her senses with Gruagach and she was able to enjoy the scorching pain.

“If you want to give up, just tell me. I have an intimate understanding of your suffering. Pleasure and anesthesia are two sides of the same coin, so a little help from a demon can solve this right away.”

“Kh.”

Finally, the tail plug slowly pulled out.

It had not simply been a toxin. As soon as the signal left, the pain receded. She could speak again, but the marionette had to gasp for breath as she asked her question.

“What...uuh...what are you...planning...planning to do on...Earth?”

“Do you know how the only man I ever loved ultimately lost his life?”

Her previous calm had vanished.

All emotion vanished from the Succubus’s voice as she whispered.

“He was assassinated. He was thrown to the bottom of a seldom-visited canyon and his legs were trapped between boulders so he could not approach the Gate and Sign Out. Then his mind and body were both slowly, slowly, slowly worn away.”

Gruagach was trembling now.

This was no comparison to before. What had once been a star student was trembling intensely from the core of the core of the core of her being. She trembled in hopeless fear and regret as if she had thoughtlessly opened Pandora’s Box.

“At the time, it still wasn’t known that objects and life forms other than the data contained in the Shining Weapons could not be directly brought back to your world, so they tried a great many things. They tried swallowing bags of herbs to fill their stomach and intestines, they tried slicing open their arms and legs to fill them with the gears used as currency, and they tried injecting potions into their blood with syringes and IVs. Those methods were proved ineffective by the experimenters’ deaths. Ultimately, they learned that only a few grams was the limit even if they sliced open their body. ...Well, it was partially to put a stop to those demonic

experiments, but it ultimately comes down to interests. There were simply a lot of people who found it more convenient if only data could be brought back. They were afraid of allowing humankind to step outside the theories proposed by that person you call the Sage.”

What was this demon trying to do?

What was she hoping to do on a planet teeming with humans!?

“Now is the time to sharpen our souls and bring back those evil deeds.”

But there was nothing Gruagach could do.

The heavy lid had already been removed.

The great hole connecting worlds had already been opened.

“My name is Tselika. Tselika Wien Alpha Chelydia Lumidrier. As I hold a single corpse in my arms, I shall fulfill my goal even if it means making an enemy of every universal law and crossing the barrier between worlds.”

Part 3

And now time returns to the present.

The location moves to the Ushigashira Shrine in Akasaka, Tokyo.

“Grandmother!!”

After passing through the Gate to Sign Out, the coke bottle glasses shrine maiden with fluffy blonde hair tied in a long tube shape ignored her own exhaustion and shouted toward the ceiling.

“Do you know what’s going on outside? What happened with that Succubus!?”

“No need to yell. They’re showing it on TV.”

“TV?”

The humans from Earth had always unilaterally passed through the Gates, learned as much Magic as they wanted, and returned without anyone interfering. They had never considered the possibility of the Nonhumans interfering with Earth. That was why society had been able to accept something as extremely irregular as Grandnir.

If that stronghold crumbled, it could easily lead to a worldwide panic.

This was blatantly not something that the mass media should be thoughtlessly reporting on.

“It was a real tragedy that it happened during the day,” explained her “grandmother”. “In other words, while the Diet was in session. It’s a legal issue, but the current system doesn’t allow for a Diet meeting to be canceled even in an emergency.”

The fluffy blonde glasses shrine maiden quickly looked down to her smartphone. The internet was down across the board, but she could still use the full seg broadcast app that picked up the signal directly from the station instead of through a browser. She tuned into a nationally-run station and found a question and answer session being held in a storm of heckling, angry shouting, and camera flashes.

“It seems the JSDF was deployed across the entire city, but was that your decision!? I do not recall a defense deployment request being submitted to those of us in the Diet. Nor was there a vote. So should I take this to mean the JSDF has become your personal army!?”

“As this is a rescue operation and not a defense deployment, everything I have done is perfectly legal under current law.”

The next thing she heard forced the shrine maiden to focus on a definite invasion.

“This is the very first time that a Break News – a paradox brought about by extreme environmental change – has reached our land in this world, so I would like you to think of my decision as the will of all the people of our nation.”

She felt faint.

Her exhaustion likely helped. The core of her body wavered and she collapsed to the tatami mats.

“Grand...mother...”

“It’s just as you’ve heard. I don’t know what she was originally, but now that she’s been confirmed inside the city, her rank has been increased. So whatever she might be, she will apparently be treated like a Break News.”

The shrine maiden checked the other channels and saw all the daytime variety shows and talk shows for housewives had been preempted. Inside a swiftly-prepared broadcast studio, employees scrambled around in the background as a woman announcer read the same script over and over. Now that the information had leaked out from the nationally-run broadcast, the local commercial broadcasts had likely decided any attempt at information control would fail to eliminate the chaos.

“We have just received further information on the Break News. All public transportation in the city has been stopped and the normal roads will also be sequentially shut down to prevent chaos. If you live in the affected area – especially if you cannot evacuate immediately – you should take shelter inside a sturdy building. Sheltering inside a car would only increase the danger, so please shelter inside a building. I repeat...”

(They need to evacuate? Shelter inside a sturdy building? That will remove the people from the streets. But what are they trying to get them away from?)

“Grandmother! Don’t tell me...!!”

It happened just as the shrine maiden yelled up at the ceiling.

The tranquil atmosphere of the Ushigashira Shrine was shredded by a great roar passing by overhead.

The entire large wooden building shook.

The fluffy blonde tearfully covered her ears and realized what was happening even without looking outside.

“Did they send fighters out!?”

“You haven’t seen it yet, but tanks and armored trucks are driving around the streets like they own the place. I have no idea how effective they’ll be, though. A good half of the military is all about appearances. When they have so much destructive power, they can’t just let an invader trample the city underfoot without fighting back.”

The attic voice paused there.

And then she spat out a much lower and more frightening voice than the shrine maiden had ever heard before.

“...They know it’s hopeless, but they’re still going to waste those innocent young lives.”

Part 4

An out-of-place figure unsteadily appeared from a giant reinforced concrete box in Ikebukuro, Tokyo. It was Gruagach, the woman with long, long

blonde hair and an outfit that looked like light armor, a pareo, and leather belts. Her looped braid had unraveled and spread out behind her. The long tail on the back of her hips and the pincers pushing up on her modest breasts provided a scorpion-esque look. And Tselika, the sexy and translucent demon, gently embraced that poor puppet from behind.

The demon technically did not exist on Earth. She could not directly interact with this world, but even while beyond the barrier between worlds, she was bound here by a great power. In the end, that difference mattered little. As long as she continued manipulating Gruagach through that barrier, she could see and touch everything on this side.

Haloed Tselika had not passed through a Gate. In fact, she had turned that idea on its head.

(There had to have been sporadic travel between the worlds before the very first Gate was built. That would explain mysterious disappearances and cryptid sightings. ...And that means it isn't the Gates that connect the worlds. If anything, they're safety devices that restrict travel. So if I destroy a few of them while the humans are down, they would malfunction and the "mysterious disappearances" would begin anew.)

The barrier between worlds was thin and pliable. It was the Gates that had remade it into something more solid.

Tselika had gone to such great lengths to interfere with this other world, but she was still not satisfied.

(A gray city that reeks of smoke and soot. How boring. Was "he" targeted and killed in another world just to protect people's control over something like this?)

With that emotion in her heart, she spoke with only wickedness in her voice.

It was not that one side or the other was her true self. This demon could process both conflicting sides without contradiction.

“Hmm. A public shared Gate, huh? Did the Religious Society decide that securing their own Gate would stand out too much for a secret organization?”

Her tone had entirely changed.

She laughed and spoke in her combination of a scale swimsuit and a snake *hagoromo*.

“It might be a religious one, but your base was a school? So the Religious Society’s elites were nothing but the kids in the student council? I know you can’t rely on people’s appearances in Grandnir, but no one would ever think the fearsome Religious Society was an afterschool adventure. Would they, Miss President?”

School, religious, student council, afterschool, president. Tselika toyed with the contents of the star student’s mind to gather the information she lacked and immediately mocked her for it.

This was why the Summon Hunter had wanted power badly enough to make a deal with a demon.

She was so talented in academics and athletics in her own world, but...no, *thus* it had damaged her pride something awful when she was branded incompetent for the first time in the other world. Especially when she was treated like a genius by everyone around her and had never experienced any setbacks or defeat.

The president had become beautiful. She had seemed to shine every time she challenged the Labyrinth. The praise had become the norm. And it was all thanks to what she did every time she visited Grandnir: took a special oil made from multiple herbs and Tselika's blood and rubbed it across every inch of her soft skin for a much crueler transformation than at a beauty salon.

But Gruagach did not resist.

In fact...

"Ha ha..."

She laughed weakly.

Her head tilted limply to the side, her eyes were not focused on reality, and a few tufts of her blonde hair got in her mouth. She only continued to laugh as her face grew so slack that drool dripped freely out.

Tselika frowned and stuck the red plug needle into the star student's back a few times.

But none of the jacks on the girl's back produced the desired result.

Her shoulders, hips, and modest chest reflexively jerked irregularly, but it was not quite what the demon wanted.

The girl only laughed eerily flatly with her head tilted limply.

And with no concern for the pain of the plug or the long hair covering her face.

"Ah ha ha, ah ha ah ha ha. Ah ha ha ha ha ha ha."

"Hm, maybe my Charm was too powerful when I hijacked her through the armor. Well, as long as she can move her arms and legs. If I don't control

her autonomic nervous system, a variety of things would probably start spilling out.”

She made sure to double-check on something.

Not on Gruagach who was now a puppet, but on the scorpion armor she wore.

When returning to Earth from Grandnir, the Shining Weapon would take the form of a small USB key smaller than a keychain, but Tselika’s armor had been specially modified in Grandnir after being built on Earth. So even when it passed from Earth to Grandnir or vice versa, its power would fill the parts in both worlds. Like a Mobius strip, both sides were the same side, so it manifested itself in its full form on either side.

The star student had too much dopamine in her brain, so the demon took control of her arms and legs to lightly twist her body around.

“Looks like there won’t be a problem using Magic.”

At that very moment, metal could be heard tearing into the asphalt as the intersection 300 meters away was blockaded. Great masses of metal awaited them. Tselika would never have seen a tank before, but she did not seem surprised.

Thanks to the armor and thanks to the blood and herb mixture soaked into her soft skin, the drool-soaked star student’s body and brain were under the demon’s control. The demon could pull out whatever information she needed.

And Tselika had to snicker when she judged her opponent’s specs.

A man sticking out from the top of the tank aimed a heavy machinegun at her and shouted through a loudspeaker.

“Attention Break News! Disarm yourself and surrender before I count to 3! We will only give you this one chance! Waste it for any reason and we will view it as a hostile action and immediately open fire!”

“Is this a joke?” spat out the translucent demon as she pressed up against the poor doll. “I have no interest in pacifism. It means straying from my primary objective, but I am irritated by the way you make a living on a foundation of corpses. I will take that irritation out on you. My name is Tselika! My weapons are the horns on my head and my shields are the wings on my back. If you wish to disarm me, then come tear those from me, human!!”

The man was true to his warning.

Since Tselika had done “something else”, the camouflaged group did not bother counting to three. The line of tanks fired one after another and launched shells at more than 5 times the speed of sound. Anti-personnel canisters scattered more than 2000 bearing balls like fireworks and APFSDSs used infrared to accurately locate their target even within all the dust. Those spears of death opened holes in the target by melting the armor instead of breaking it and they mercilessly bared their fangs against that round, soft flesh.

There should have been nothing recognizable as human left.

“Didn’t I tell you, human?”

The atmosphere was entirely taken away.

While possessed by Tselika through the thin barrier between worlds, blonde Gruagach now stood on top of one of the tanks. She stood back to back with the heavy machinegun soldier. When? How? Before the shells had been

The bomber in the back seat gave a report while viewing a monitor that had reversed polarity so it would not grow entirely white from the explosive flames

“All bombs hit. Repeat, all bombs hit!”

“This is urban warfare and in the capital of Japan at that. It’d be a major problem if we missed. If we’re sure of that, then let’s get out of here.”

They did not notice they had blown away the ground unit with their bombs.

In fact, they could not see the ground unit. Or anything else besides Tselika.

So after finishing the bombing and beginning to rise to a safe altitude, their reaction upon seeing “that” may not have been surprising.

They saw “that” deep, deep, deep inside the window of a building several hundred meters ahead.

Tselika Wien Alpha Chelydia Lumidrier.

And the star student she had hijacked.

However, they should not have been able to see her so deep inside that window as it reflected the sunlight.

“...Target spotted...”

The fighter changed heading and accelerated.

Similar warnings arrived over the radio.

“J-Wolf 02 to J-Wolf 01. We’ve spotted the target too.”

“J-Wolf 03 here. Awaiting instructions.”

“J-Wolf 04, we can target her. Let’s end this.”

The pilot breathed in and out. Several hundred meters was the blink of an eye for a fighter, so he did not hesitate to speak as the building wall spread out before his eyes.

“J-Wolf 01 to all fighters. Change formation from diamond to boomerang. Engage. Begin attack.”

A moment later, 4 spears pierced the building wall and blossomed into large flowers.

“You dumbass! Switch off the monitors!!”

A woman in glasses and a tight skirt shouted while traveling inside a mobile base disguised as a cold storage truck.

As her subordinate was gradually swallowed up by the “effects”, she tightened his tie with one hand to knock him unconscious and she used a lithe leg contained in black panty hose to kick out the power cable and forcibly shut off the machines.

“Bhah!! Pant, pant! Ch-chief, you saved me.”

“You can thank me after taking a psychological test with a counsellor, Inoue. It’s too soon to say whether you’ve really escaped her influence. Tanaka, you watch over him!”

“...What was that?” hesitantly asked the young man.

Everyone silently focused on the woman in a tight skirt. She cleared her throat and answered.

“I don’t know any of the details. There haven’t been any experiments proving that something in the other world can influence ours through the thin barrier between them. But that Break News is a Succubus. That means this must be based on a Charm-style Skill. For example...she might take control of anyone whose heart is taken in by her aura.”

If it was simply something biological like her voice or pheromones, her influence would not reach inside a tank or fighter. But if it had to do with a vague “atmosphere” or “aura”, then she could bind someone’s heart even over the phone or internet. Everyone had experienced that on some level, such as getting excited watching a live soccer match or feeling disgusted by a post on a message board. People’s emotions could be controlled even when the other person was not physically in front of them.

But in that case...

“This isn’t good... We easily outdo them on the information gathering front, but that’s exactly why her Charm can spread without end. Her contamination will spread throughout the military.”

If only they could use Magic.

But that was not possible at the moment.

“...can...hear me? Someone respond!!”

The tight skirt woman clenched her teeth and listened to a radio transmission separate from the dead monitors.

“This is the Shinjuku Station PB! We’re full up! The trains aren’t running and we’re already over capacity for evacuees! Sending any more here would be dangerous!! Send the evacuees elsewhere! And more importantly,

she's...goddammit, what the hell is that huge-ass squid monster!? It's more than 10 stories tall! Can someone with Grandnir experience explain this!?"

"You've gotta be kidding..."

Soon thereafter, a violent tremor shook the truck. The tight skirt glasses woman made up her mind and brought the monitors back to life.

She saw countless bizarrely shaped creatures crawling on the buildings and elevated train tracks or highways.

"Tselika took in someone with a summoning Job!? Dammit!!"

Part 5

"Boo Boo."

"..."

Beatrice called out that name in the rubble-strewn inn town.

Boo Boo was hanging his head.

He had wanted to save the Nun who was having stones thrown at her for no good reason. He had wanted to stop the Religious Society because they were being mean to the Succubus and had even sent in a Break News. He had wanted to rescue a girl who was having her life taken for a purge of Nonhumans instead of to live or to eat. But all those feelings had been betrayed, trampled on, and used against him. He likely felt responsible.

"It's okay, Boo Boo. There's nothing you need to worry about."

"But I can't go to your world. I can't help at all."

He stopped speaking there.

And then he started up again.

“I can’t even stop the Nun.”

Technically, Tselika had not gone to Earth. She was still in Grandnir and only influencing Earth through the thin barrier between worlds, but there was nothing they could do on this side. Just as you could not observe or reach the edge of the ever-expanding universe, the demon would not fall back down anywhere visible as long as Gruagach continued to pull her toward Tokyo through the thin barrier.

“We’ll deal with our own world’s problem on our own. So don’t look so sad, Boo Boo.”

Beatrice gave him a baseless smile but then stopped speaking.

Boo Boo had hugged the slender girl.

He was not calm enough to do it like a pretentious gentleman. The giant Iberian Orc was trembling like a child lost in a strange city. He was afraid.

“I don’t want you to go.”

“...”

“I can’t go with you. I won’t be able to go save you even if you ask for help. I can’t do anything, so someone else has to stop the Nun. I know that, but I’m dumb, so I can’t stop myself from wanting you to stay here.”

What would Beatrice even be able to do?

If she did leave Grandnir and return to Tokyo, she would become a powerless girl. She would be unable to use any Magic at all. Her slender arms could not break a walnut, much less a boulder. She had never used a normal sword or gun. And on top of those physical issues were the political ones. Back in the real world, she was like a bird in a cage and could not take one step outside Roppongi’s Detached Magic Palace.

If there was nothing she could do, it would be best if she did not return.

It would be safer to remain in Grandnir until the commotion had died down.

The more she thought about it, the more hopeless any kind of attempt seemed.

But.

He had said nothing bad would happen if they all got along. That Nun would have been a part of that.

Beatrice nearly fell into self-loathing when she found herself thinking about her own safety while Boo Boo looked on the verge of tears.

So she threw out all of those boring assumptions before she started hating herself.

“Boo Boo.”

She threw out the vague smile.

That was not what she needed to calm his trembling.

“Don’t worry, Boo Boo. There’s still something you can do.”

“?”

“Surface level niceties don’t matter. I trust that we truly understand each other’s hearts. So let’s speak frankly here. That way we can eliminate the weight hanging between us.”

“Right. I trust you too.”

Boo Boo rubbed his eyes and nodded several times.

Beatrice wished he was not 4 meters tall so she could reach his head.

“Boo Boo, it is true that we are partially responsible for this. I won’t say all responsibility lies with us, but we did lay out the fuse leading to the bomb. But make no mistake. There is still something we can do instead of letting that responsibility crush us.”

“Like what?”

“Well, I’ll be returning to the other side. You were right that you can’t go to Tokyo, but there is something you can do here in Grandnir. Are you willing to hear me out?”

This went beyond just protecting Tokyo or Japan.

It was about Boo Boo.

She would protect that kind Iberian Orcs’ soul. She would save him.

This would come with its own risks. And these risks filled her gut with far more tension than the formless ideas of the world or humankind.

She would bet her life on this fight. For his sake.

“Okay, are you listening, Boo Boo?”

In the Detached Magic Palace of Roppongi, Tokyo, a girl in a red dress Signed Out through her exclusive Gate and saw several thin contrails cutting across the blue sky. That was probably a formation of JSDF fighters. She prayed it was not some missiles fired into the city from an American submarine.

She then spotted a small maid waiting near the gazebo in the large garden. If she could see the maid, the maid could see her, so this was no time to be

sneaking around. She walked boldly up to the maid and placed her hands on the small girl's shoulders.

And she asked a question at extreme close range.

"Haruka, we're friends, aren't we?"

"Uuh, I really don't want to be friends with someone who starts a conversation like that..."

"Don't worry. I won't ask you to do anything dangerous. In fact, you don't have to do anything at all. I want you to overlook something."

"?"

The maid tilted her head in confusion, so the twintail girl inhaled and exhaled.

Her heart was pounding.

But she still said it.

"I'm about to break out of the Detached Magic Palace, but I want you to keep quiet about-..."

"Ugyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!!!"

The maid screamed before she could even finish making her request.

This maid was not worthy of friendship. The girl pouted her lips as the oldest sister Iroka and second sister Misoka arrived to see what was going on.

The smallest maid's mouth flapped open and closed as she pointed at her master's face and did her best to make a report and share her information.

“U-u-umm! Milady is...try...trying to...she said she’s trying to leave the Detached Magic Palace on her own!!”

As the small one’s voice jumped all over the place, the medium and large ones rubbed their finger against their temple.

Iroka, the glasses tutor and the maid with the biggest chest, winked and asked a question.

“Does this have anything to do with the contrails overhead?”

“Exactly. It couldn’t have more to do with it.”

Misoka, the sporty second sister who handled the heavy lifting during the cleaning and garden work, spoke next.

“Is there any reason you have to deal with this yourself, lady?”

“It is true that I don’t have a grand reason such as stopping a world war fought over the Pieces. But I want to do whatever I can to protect someone important to me who is feeling depressed back in Grandnir because of how responsible he feels about all this. He wanted to save the Nun from having her life lost in a purge that was entirely unnecessary to live or to eat. He wanted to get along with everyone. But his feelings were trampled on and he can’t save her since he can’t leave that world. There might be 7 billion other people in this world, but I’m the only one that can save his soul here.”

“I see.”

The maids looked at their master’s face with an appraising look.

They were charged with taking care of the dress girl and keeping her in top condition, but the Information Broker also had them report on any hint of coming danger and use force if necessary to swiftly stop any attempted “jailbreak”.

...Officially, anyway.

“Very well, we will accept this job.”



“A sheltered girl like you wouldn’t know, lady, but Tokyo is a dangerous city. Especially for pretty girls like you. You will need some bodyguards.”

The red dress girl’s eyes widened.

Even Haruka, who had loudly betrayed her, clenched her small fists and gave a snort.

“That’s right! You mustn’t even think about going out on your own!! If you’re leaving, you need to take us with you!!”

“...”

The black twintail girl was utterly shocked.

She and the 3 maids had been having different arguments the whole time.

“U-um, are you sure about that? Given your position and all...”

“Miss, no one stands in a more dangerous position than you. So we must also accept some risk.”

Iroka, the biggest maid, crossed her arms and lifted her ample breasts from below.

“And I liked that you mentioned someone important to you. Yes, I liked it very much. You have been imprisoned in this birdcage for the convenience of the nation...no, the world. You could have held a grudge against the entire world for that, but you still managed to find someone important to you. I won’t let the Information Broker crush that underfoot.”

Part 6

The report reached the Ushigashira Shrine in Akasaka, Tokyo, almost immediately.

The coke bottle glasses shrine maiden with fluffy blonde hair tied in a long tube shape went pale, but she did not have time to feel faint. She scrambled out of the Dragon Palace Chamber.

The voice in the attic spoke to her like normal.

“Where are you going, stupid girl?”

“We can give the title of ‘stupid’ to Beatrice. She’s...that complete idiot! I don’t know if this is for Boo Boo or what, but why doesn’t she know this will only place the noose around her own neck? She might never be able to go back to Grandnir!!”

“The same goes for you. Do not forget your Ushigashira duty. Your job is to-...”

“Oh, shut up, you old hag!! A good friend I’m willing to entrust my life to is prepared to throw out her entire life here! How can I just follow the rules and waaatch!?”

“...”

Silence followed.

But it lacked the tension of a silent elevator. It was a somehow soft and gentle atmosphere.

“Then head outside and stop by the 4th storeroom. The key to the basement is inside one of the *temari* balls in the kid’s room. The one that rattles when you shake it.”

“?”

She did as instructed and felt like she had wandered outside of Japan.

It was like a collection in a movie. Every wall was covered in cutting-edge firearms. There were also plenty of bulletproof vests, gasmasks, and grenades of various types. It was a major problem that a historical shrine had this hidden below it. It could easily turn into a scandal.

“Wh-why is all this here?”

Weapons had originally been stored below the shrine after the end of World War Two so they could put up a thorough resistance if the American military tried to pillage the shrine’s valuable cultural assets and that collection had been continually updated as time passed, but the old lady’s voice gave an immediate answer that elided all of that lengthy tradition.

“It must have been prepared for this very day.”

Part 7

The fallen star student – or rather, translucent Tselika who indirectly controlled her through the armor binding her – had known her destination from the beginning.

“Ebisu 1-3 Sakuradai Kubancho Minamigasaki 8-4. Hmm, as I thought, it isn’t in this girl’s knowledge. I’ll just have to hope for a general idea...”

Black smoke and dust blew from the frontline where Tselika spoke in an almost carefree tone with her angel halo, devil horns, scale swimsuit, and thick snake *hagoromo*.

The area was a complete disaster zone.

An explosion had blasted a tank’s turret straight up. An armored truck had broken through the ground and fallen into the subway station. An attack helicopter had pierced a building wall while its rotor continued to spin

fruitlessly. After the pilot ejected, a fighter pinwheeled through the sky while spewing explosive flames.

The foot soldiers had fared no better.

Just like a losing army, a look in the alleyways would likely find men who had frantically stripped off their camouflage uniforms. Needless to say, they were trying to escape harm by blending in with the civilians.

And if they were doing that, there was no need to deal with them.

They were not even worth taking in with her Charm.

She was using the Summon Hunter's power to send out a variety of creatures, but once they lost sight of their target, they started fighting each other for control of this territory. A one-eyed giant known as a Cyclops and a slithering multi-headed dragon known as a Typhon were clashing between 5-story buildings that matched their height. They were the same as Tselika. They were interfering in Tokyo because Gruagach allowed them to push their power against the other side of the thin layer between worlds.

Tselika thought to herself as she sent Gruagach below the arch created by fighting monsters.

(It would probably be about 50/50 if they sent in fully program-controlled drones, but it looks like they want to have a human cushion in place to avoid malfunctions. That makes it easy to control them. My Charm can contaminate hearts even through relayed messages and letters. It doesn't matter if I am actually there or not.)

Goat-horned Tselika's modern knowledge was based on that of star student Gruagach, so it was biased in certain directions. She did not find much about the military, but she was surprised to find a lot of reference material

in entertainment movies when it came to unmanned weapons. It took guts to rely on that when one's life was on the line. Tselika had to grimace.

"Cars, trains... They seem to have a lot of convenient systems built up, but it looks like both of those have been stopped. I suppose walking will be my best option."

Tselika was using a borrowed body, so she only cared that it lasted long enough to achieve her goal. Muscular exhaustion was of no concern to her. When a three-headed guard dog known as a Cerberus and a fertility snake woman known as an Echidna bared their fangs against Gruagach, Tselika used the sacrifice's fists to beat them down before continuing her march.

More and more creatures were summoned everywhere within 200 meters around them: behind vending machines, below cars, inside manholes, etc. Some of them ignored the road altogether and appeared inside the buildings and behind barricades. Some even surrounded Tselika as if to curse her.

But the demon did not care.

The Grandnir monsters were indeed powerful, but they were still no match for Tselika.

That was just how powerful the cultural fire known as Magic was.

Meanwhile...

"?"

With a loud screech of tires on asphalt (a noise Tselika was quickly growing accustomed to), a cold storage truck came to a rapid stop a short distance away. The rear door opened and someone stepped out. It was a glasses woman with her long hair tied back whose tight suit had the necktie

removed. She looked different, but Tselika still recognized her. Translucent Tselika scoffed and named the woman while embracing the drooling and unfocused star student.

“Armeline, huh?”

“You have good eyes. So you know what kind of fighting style I prefer, right?”

A heavy sound followed.

A metal ball the size of a balance ball was attached to a thick chain. It should have been far too heavy for the woman’s slender arms to support, but she lightly tossed it up with a single arm and caught it like it was made of rubber.

“I’m a Fighter Priest. I might rely on Magic, but the basic element is physical force. ...So if I can use other means to reproduce the physical support the Magic provides, it isn’t hard to recreate my Grandnir fighting style back here in the real world.”

In this case, she wore a reinforcing suit that was expected to assist in construction, nursing, agriculture, and the military.

It was primarily located around her hips, but robot arms seemed to crawl out onto her bare arms and legs. This representative smart tool was rumored to allow someone to carry several times or even several dozen times as much weight as a normal person.

She would also sometimes summon a Magic metal ball that absorbed the destroyed rubble to increase its attack power with each swing, but that was easily recreated with a metal ball and a tank of instant glue.

“That’s why I was known as a bizarre level cap adventurer, but it looks like that title’s been stolen from me. Now that I’ve been robbed of the belt, I’ve got to take it back.”

Several men and women in suits left the cold storage truck.

They all held identical metal balls and thick chains to the glasses woman known as Armelina.

“I’ll be taking it back with me and they’ll show what the mass-produced model can do. What would we do without the Ministry of Defense’s tech lab? This is human strength. If we monopolize the technology, its value rises. If we release it, everyone can do the same thing. It all comes down to how you use it.”

“Heh heh.”

Translucent Tselika traced her fingers across the star student’s bodylines as she laughed.

She ignored the monsters fighting each other nearby and she kept Armelina in the center of her vision.

“That is impressive. It is an approach not found in this girl’s knowledge. You could even say the atmosphere here belongs to you. ...But have you forgotten? Gruagach the fallen student is still wearing this Shining Weapon armor. And it is still armor rather than a USB key. That means she has truly brought Magic here. So she can use Command-type attack Magic of any Element she wants.”

A sticky sound came from Gruagach’s feet.

Several tentacles thicker than anacondas stretched out from her shadow. They crawled up her bare legs, wrapped around her thighs, and attempted to violate her entire body.

All of a sudden, she held a Western-style bow with a stabilizer and with a knife on either end.

Yes, this was a 2nd Shining Weapon.

The armor and bow made 2. The translucent demon ignored all of the rules as she controlled her puppet and pierced the crawling tentacles with the bow's lower knife. The thick, thick tentacles left some stickiness on Gruagach's thighs as they were absorbed by the manmade object. The bowstring wriggled creepily and was drawn.

If she nocked an arrow, the wriggling tentacles would be transferred to that like an infection.

The bizarre monster would be contained inside the arrowhead as if sealing a poison or an explosive inside.

Gruagach was a Summon Hunter.

That rare Job allowed her to call up any Grandnir Nonhuman she had made a contract with and either make it fight for her or seal it in her blade to transform the weapon's effects.

Tselika laughed as she viewed the eerily pulsating arrowhead and the tentacle tips that occasionally jutted out.

"A Scylla, hm? Not bad. This arrowhead will swim freely through the air upon its release, its 12 legs will entangle the target, and their viselike grip can crush even a steel pillar. But you are about to discover that firsthand, Armelina."

“...That Shining Weapon.”

“The armor is the one in control. The arrow is a slave device, or maybe more like an extra option. But as you can plainly see, these are not built to show any concern for the bearer’s personality.”

As the translucent demon embraced the star student from behind, she buried her face in the girl’s nape. When the demon’s lips touched her neck, a glowing emblem of unknown effect spread across her skin.

Gruagach had already shown no sign of resistance, but now the last shreds of her will vanished from her fingers.

Now that she had become a true puppet, the mass of soft skin raised the bow.

The stabilizer-equipped bow accurately targeted its prey.

“Now, I will reclaim the atmosphere here in an instant. And you will become yet another puppet. Think carefully about what it is you wanted to protect enough to stand in my way like this. That is the list of what you are about to lose.”

“Hah.”

The tight suit and black panty hose woman laughed quietly with the metal ball in hand.

She belonged to an external sector that left no official records by acting as a private detective agency that gathered retired police officers and JSDF officers. She understood the value of information, so she did not speak her actual thoughts in front of her enemy.

There was never a 100% chance of victory in battle. But she had accepted that risk. She had received a report from Roppongi’s Detached Magic

Palace. She knew a certain girl was plotting something, so she needed nothing more. This was worth it if she could buy some time and increase that girl's odds of success.

That was valuable information, so the glasses woman smiled and spoke to hide it.

"Let's go, little girl. I just wish you could lend me that Charm Skill of yours."

"?"

She swung the metal ball around by its thick chain.

This was an undeniable hostile act. The heavy metal ball dully and gradually picked up speed like it was rolling down a hill.

"I have a pretty rough job, so I haven't exactly been blessed in the romance department. I thought I might still have a faint chance left in Grandnir, but then this trouble had to crop up. I'll teach you not to underestimate a human woman's grudge!!"

Part 8

"Boo Boo, this is like a Mobius strip," began Beatrice. "We can return to Earth, but we probably won't have any way of defeating Tselika. You can beat up Gruagach and Tselika, but you probably don't have any way of going to Earth. So neither case gives us what we need. At this rate, there is no resolving this no matter how hard we try."

"Hm? What's a Mobius strip?"

"It's this."

Beatrice cut off a short piece of first aid bandage, twisted it, and had Boo Boo trace his finger along the surface of the loop a few times.

“Both sides are the same side! What is this!?”

“Yeah, it’s strange, but we can talk about it later. ...What matters is that the only way for us to defeat Tselika is to do something about this twisted loop. Let me tell you what you need to do, Boo Boo.”

She left the Detached Magic Palace and entered the public roads of Roppongi.

She took another first step.

This was the beginning of a resistance against a powerful current.

“ ... ”

The red dress girl slowly breathed in and out. Once she left the Detached Magic Palace’s garden, she found herself in a gray city of concrete and asphalt that seemed to sap her of her stamina. Her throat felt strange. The depths of her eyes hurt. Tokyo apparently had one of the highest population densities in the world, but it seemed like humans had a tendency to submerge themselves in mud in their search for livelihood.

The city was frighteningly still.

The girl had expected to find the JSDF and riot police putting up a reckless fight, but she found nothing of the sort.

Nothing was certain.

But based on what she saw and the habits of the VIPs who would visit the Detached Magic Palace, she quickly found an answer.

“They’ve abandoned Tokyo, haven’t they?”

“Eh? Eh?”

Haruka, the small animal of a maid and the youngest of the sisters, nervously tried to ask what she meant. She was clearly trapped between a fear of asking and a fear of not asking.

“After putting up a bit of a fight, they realized it was hopeless and readily changed tack. There’s a summit meeting in Yokohama right now, isn’t there? They’ve probably had the JSDF set up a defensive line there on the pretext of protecting the different national leaders gathered there. But once they surreptitiously get our own government VIPs there, the preparations will be complete and they’ll have their safe zone. Makes a pretty good argument for the decentralization of power if you ask me.”

The only forces remaining would be a JSDF suicide unit tasked with buying time as a rear guard.

And perhaps some powerless but righteous police officers.

“I have intercepted the police radio,” said Iroka, the oldest of the maid sisters who was a tutor, wore glasses, and had a mole under her eye. She connected her tablet to a boxy device she held. “The hostile target is moving south from Ikebukuro and passing through Shinjuku. That means she has ignored the administrative agencies and continued moving. She made a slight eastward adjustment near Yoyogi, but she is still headed south.”

That could not have been as easy as she made it sound since modern radio transmissions were digitally encrypted, but they could still be decoded if you knew how. And Iroka’s skill was not restricted to this. A single swipe of a finger on her tablet and she could remotely take control of any smartphone she wanted.

The red dress girl had seen this enough times to not be surprised, so she focused on the task at hand.

Her usual habits led her to check for a Shining Weapon rapier at her hip, but in Tokyo she could not use her 14,000 kinds of Magic or summon even the most basic map. She only reminded herself that her wings had been clipped.

She lacked Parameter buffs and Recovery Magic.

She also lacked the Iberian Orc who was always by her side. ...She had never thought she would feel so helpless without that giant form next to her.

Reality had different rules, so a single hit would be deadly in this battle.

She knew that, but the twintail girl immediately turned around.

“So she’s headed for Shibuya? No, maybe Ebisu.”

Their opponent had ignored important buildings like the Meiji Shrine and the foreign embassies as she continued south. She was merciless in her elimination of and counterattack against the JSDF, but she showed no sign of indiscriminately attacking the civilians in this densely populated city. Her objective was something of a mystery, but the red dress girl started by thinking of the landmarks in that area.

Ebisu was primarily known for its beer, but there were some more impressive facilities nearby.

“The Ministry of Defense Technology Laboratory. Isn’t that where they carry out experiments related to Shining Weapons and the Gates?”

“Th-then is the monster after that?”

“ ... ”

The red dress girl had suggested it herself, but the idea seemed somehow off to her. Tselika already had the ability to interfere with one world from the other, so what would she want from the humans now?

From there, she pulled out more information from her mind.

Was there anything else important at that laboratory besides the Shining Weapons and the Gates?

“ ...The Sage.”

That mysterious person or group of people had anonymously proposed the existence of Grandnir, the possibility of Magic, and the possibility of the technological revolutions brought by the Pieces. It was still not known if that was an individual or an organization and it was entirely unknown where in the world they were hiding. But weren't there rumors that the Sage or someone who could directly contact them could be found at the Ministry of Defense Technology Laboratory?

Rumors were no more than rumors. Information found on the internet was only so credible. She was well aware of that.

But she also could not overlook it.

“Iroka. You see it a lot in dramas and movies, but how long would it take to fully delete data from a computer? And I mean so it can't be recovered.”

“First of all, there is no such thing as deleting beyond all recovery. But if you would accept odds of recovery as close to zero as possible, it would probably take 12 hours with a commercial laptop. It would be faster to soak it in powerful acid, but that too depends on the scope. A single hard disk

would not take long, but a supercomputer or server system larger than a gym would be another story entirely.”

“ ... ”

A laboratory would of course be the latter. So even if the workers and VIPs began a frantic evacuation operation, there was still a risk of data leading to the Sage remaining. That was the most likely location. It would probably be best to plan for making contact with the enemy in Ebisu and move north to Shibuya if that did not work out.

Haruka, the smallest maid, clenched her fists and spoke.

“B-but this might be our chance. We’re closer.”

(The real question is whether or not we can defeat her, not whether or not we can catch up to her.)

The red dress girl decided to leave that part unsaid.

There was no point in showing off her knowledge if it would only needlessly worry the girl.

Misoka spoke up next while holding a mop that was likely a tool to open doors from a distance instead of a weapon.

“The question is if we can get there when we have to risk our lives the entire way. Well, we just have to do what we can.”

Japan’s capital was no longer functioning as the red dress girl led the 3 maids through it. Destroyed and abandoned cars had produced seemingly endless traffic jams and broken windows were everywhere. It was not uncommon to find pillars of black smoke or tilted hunks of concrete. The roads had collapsed in places, exposing the subway tracks below. Some

chunks of road larger than vending machines had fallen on the tracks, so the subway would not be functioning at the moment.

“Wh-where did all the normal people go?”

“They’re either sheltering indoors or they Signed In if they were near a Gate registered with their smartphone. They can escape the threat in Tokyo by going to Grandnir and they also receive a variety of buffs from magic.”

It was ironic that fleeing to fantasy-filled Grandnir was the safest way to escape this limited number of monsters.

“B-b-but what if they don’t make it in time? And what about the ones who weren’t registered to go to Grandnir?”

“...”

The red dress girl knew that question had an unpleasant answer.

At that very moment, she heard a loud metallic clattering approach them. It sounded a lot like a convertible leaving the wedding chapel for the honeymoon. It was actually a pizza shop scooter. It was dragging around a bunch of empty cans tied to the back by strings.

A boy was yelling into a megaphone so as not to be drowned out by the racket.

“Hey, hey, hey!! I’ll draw the monsters’ attention, so get your asses to the nearest Gate! If that won’t work, head to a police station! The cops are still with us!! I doubt those squids and octopuses can understand me, so I’ll cuss them out all I want. Hey, ugly! *****!!”

“Looks like they’re doing surprisingly well,” muttered the red dress girl as she watched the noisy pizza shop scooter drive past. But then the second maid sister seemed to remember something.

“Hey, but wait. If he’s drawing them to him, doesn’t that mean those...extreme problem children will be on their way!?”

And.

A giant form appeared almost too easily.

“Wah! This isn’t good! It’s one of those 10-story ones! What is it? A giant squid!?”

“It’s a Kraken and don’t even think about trying to defeat it. Iroka, Misoka, please secure us a route.”

“We can’t escape something that huge on foot. And the cars and motorcycles aren’t much use with all this congestion.”

“Let’s head down below the collapsed asphalt. Miss, this way.”

Even now, a few mountain bikes could be seen jumping from rooftop to rooftop atop the buildings around the Kraken. The lights on their handlebars were probably smartphones. The video producers were as crazy as ever.

Those people had not been killed yet because the summoned creatures were not very well controlled. The giant Kraken was clashing with a fusion of animals known as a Chimera. The decision to work together, butt heads, or eliminate each other was entirely up to the creatures. That both created openings and also made their next action harder to predict.

(These aren’t mechanical Gimmicks. They’re residents of Grandnir just like Boo Boo.)

She felt bitter about that, but she did not have time to focus on that now. If they were more powerful than the JSDF, she did not have to worry about them being hunted down right away. The red dress girl had to trust in the

strength of human and Nonhuman alike instead of just standing there. She and the maids made their way underground.

She could not float down like she could in Grandnir, so she struggled to climb down the several meter drop while pure white tentacles arrived much too close for comfort.

She found a subway tunnel down below, but concrete blocks larger than refrigerators had fallen and pillars had collapsed to block the track. No trains were going to be running anytime soon.

The 4 of them relied on the almost uselessly sparse fluorescent lighting to walk down the tunnel.

Misoka used her mop to search along the dark ground ahead of them, but it was not all smooth sailing.

“Hm? I hear flapping wings.”

“Shh. That silhouette looks like a Harpy. They’re strong in the Wind element and react to vibrations in the air, so don’t speak too loudly.”

“You know a lot about this, miss.”

“Unlike the Gimmicks and Traps in the Labyrinth, these ones walk around out in the open. Boo Boo might know more about them than me.”

A Harpy was a Nonhuman that looked like a human woman with large bird wings for arms, and they did not stand out much compared to Dragons or Griffons. But that was only when you were protected by Magic. This was like running across a bird of prey more than 10 times as strong as a large eagle. A handgun bullet would not reach it and the talons of its legs could tear through a steel door like wet paper.

And...

“This will be especially bad if they’re working together. Look at the damage to the walls.”

“Ugh...are these fist marks? That’s concrete...”

“It looks just like the marks a Minotaur puts on a stone to mark its territory. I’m not sure if they’re coexisting or competing, but let’s give up on being optimistic. If the others gather when the Harpy gives a cry, it would be best to avoid the Harpy.”

Fortunately, the intense fighting on the surface seemed to be placing a burden on the subway tunnel as well. Cracks were running through the walls and pillars. It was simple enough for the girls to slip through those large cracks and escape to another underground structure.

They passed through a labyrinthine underground mall.

They passed through a largescale drain meant to prevent flooding.

They passed through a strange storage base.

Small Haruka hesitantly spoke as she looked around the new scenery after passing through another wall.

“A-are we really going the right way? There aren’t any landmarks, so I feel like we’ve been going around in circles...”

“Not to worry,” assured eldest Iroka.

“Ebisu is this way,” whispered the red dress girl as she faced forward. “I would never lose my bearings while underground.”

The situation could hardly be worse.

If they ran into one of the Harpies or Minotaurs wandering the narrow and complex underground passageways, they would be wiped out on the spot.

But the red dress girl seemed more alive down in this dark subterranean space than among the gray buildings on the surface.

Was that because it reminded her of the Labyrinth?

Or was it because having people walking alongside her reminded her of someone important to her?

“This feels like seeing my father at work. Lady, your eyes are shining in this deadly labyrinth below Tokyo.”

Territorial signs, shed fur, bite marks in fruit, droppings, scrapes on the walls and floor. She identified the Nonhumans from the various tracks they left and worked to avoid them.

“This was a Centaur and...a Lamia. The snake woman follows the residual heat on the ground...in other words, footprints. Cover our shoes with a towel or something and we can slip past her.”

She used her knowledge of whether they used their sight, hearing, smell, or other senses to detect prey and found a way around that. They continued on and on when any encounter meant instant death.

Their intense focus seemed to wear down their lifespans, but their march finally came to an end.

They looked straight up within a narrow subway cable inspection corridor and focused on the manhole at the top of the ladder.

“This is the place, miss. This should be the center of Ebisu, by the giant complex near the subway station.”

“Let’s pray we don’t find ourselves right next to a Kraken that can grab and crush entire buildings.”

They returned to the surface through the manhole.

Due to the part of the city this was, there were signs for beer companies all over. They heard a familiar advertisement jingle coming from the empty station. After the high voltage lines had been severed, the trains had likely used their battery power to automatically evacuate to the closest station. It looked like some roadwork had been underway near the large complex that was something of a landmark. The asphalt had been cut into and the heavy machinery had been abandoned there.

“Where’s the closest Gate?”

“Um, there is a public model in the gym on the first floor of the complex.”

Haruka had not hacked into the system like Iroka would. Unlike the exclusive models in shrines, cathedrals, and JSDF facilities, the location of general-use Gates was public knowledge. They were located in schools, parks, and gyms. Their locations were marked with red circles on the guide maps at subway stations.

The red dress girl picked up a metal measuring tape fallen to the side of the roadwork and glanced at the train tracks running parallel across an elevated pathway.

“Iroka, I’m going to write down some important chemical numbers, so you check the contents of those freight trains. Misoka, I doubt they had any explosives or fuses prepared for this roadwork, but if I’m right, there should be some acetylene and oxygen tanks. Haruka, you gather gasoline from the abandoned cars. We each have to do whatever we can. Also, if you have the time, head to the back of the buildings. It would help if we could get our hands on some propane.”

“W-wait, wait. That will leave you without a single bodyguard.”

“I don’t need one.”

The red dress girl was looking at something other than the maids.

No, glaring at.

“I’ve already found her. And silencing the evil demon lord is a Holy Swordswoman’s job.”

Part 9

Gruagach, the fallen star student, was manipulated by her blue scorpion armor to carry translucent Tselika calmly across Japan’s capital.

Most of the JSDF and riot police had already retreated, the stubborn remaining volunteers had been taken in by Tselika’s Charm, and a Kraken or Scylla could be sent in to directly eliminate them if they were in the way while attacking each other.

This world likely had plenty of weapons with extraordinary destructive power, but they never chose that option because this was the capital of a nation. Nevertheless, the situation only worsened as they waited around. As people were taken in by Tselika’s aura and her Charm worked its way in through any gap, she quickly had complete control of the situation. And that control would eventually spread beyond just the one country.

But she felt no pride in that.

She was only fighting to eliminate those who would get in her way. It was not directly connected to her objective.

“Ebisu 1-3 Sakuradai Kubancho Minamigasaki 8-4. Ebisu 1-3 Sakuradai Kubancho Minamigasaki 8-4.”

The invader muttered something below her breath as she advanced through empty streets filled with black smoke.

There was only one thing on her mind.

"Hey, baby. I'll show you that humans aren't completely worthless."

She had met a certain human.

They were from different worlds and would normally have never met.

When they had first met, his thoughts and actions had utterly baffled her, but that was why the short-haired man had attracted her interest. She had been unable to stop the part of her that wanted to understand him so very badly.

"It's not like I have any real reason. Life is finite and I want to have fun and enjoy every minute and every second of it, so what good is worrying over the same things over and over? So even if it's a bit of a pain, I've gotta solve all the trouble I happen across."

The woman had been called a Succubus.

The humans visiting Grandnir had called her that. They had said there were similar legends in their world. But when she had asked about those legends, the man had only given her a troubled look. She had done everything she could to ask as many humans as possible and then she had laughed. The humans were very observant. But it was not enough. That word was woefully insufficient to describe a demon like Tselika.

But one man had tried not to hurt the feelings of even an evil woman like her.

Just how much had that small effort helped fill her dried-up heart?

Not even the man in the bulky armor and giant axe could know that.

“Basically, it’s about getting a good night’s sleep. A drink of victory tastes so much better than one meant to distract you from a loss. I’m an honest person, so I want my drink to taste the best it can.”

They had spent a long, long time together.

She had even accompanied him into the Labyrinth that Nonhumans never approached.

She had wanted to walk with that human even if it meant throwing out everything: her life, her style, her taboos, and her rules. That desire had grown in her heart.

“I know it can never happen, but I can’t help but think about it. I wish I could show it to you.”

However, it had all been torn to pieces.

That man was no more.

The fact that it was an assassination did not matter. She could not be bothered with something as trivial as revenge. Tselika Wien Alpha Chelydia Lumidrier’s soul craved only one thing. To anyone else it would have seemed meaningless, but it was more valuable than the entire planet to her.

“My home is small, but it’s got this huge cherry tree outside. Every year during flower viewing season, a bunch of old guys I’ve never seen before gather in the yard with bottles of sake in hand. I guess you wouldn’t know what cherry blossoms are, would you? If only they grew here in Grandnir too.”

She did not care what anyone else thought.

She had no reason whatsoever to visit the Ministry of Defense Technology Laboratory which was rumored to contain the Sage or someone who could contact them.

She would simply visit that house.

She would see what that armored man had wanted her to see.

“ ... ”

Ebisu 1-3 Sakuradai Kubancho Minamigasaki 8-4.

That address had not been on the guide map near the subway station.

She had made general guesses, wandered back and forth along the same roads several times, and finally found it.

Tselika found that location.

It really was tiny.

It was only a rundown apartment that looked left behind by time between two buildings.

It was far from cherry blossom season.

And with the sunlight blocked by the surrounding buildings, was the soil even alive any longer? Had the tree withered away? Those were the questions she felt herself asking.

“ ... ”

Even so, Tselika took a step forward with her angel halo and devil horns.

She walked unsteadily.

“Oh?”

That carefree voice came from near the landlord's room on the first floor of the apartment. An old woman sat on the small veranda sticking out into the damp yard that did not receive much sun.

"Not often someone stops by here. Surely you aren't hoping to rent a room. Are you lost?"

"Who...are you?"

Tselika voiced her confusion.

She was the demon who had shaken Tokyo suing the armor binding the star student, but the old woman did not look remotely concerned.

The old woman explained why.

"Sorry, but I can barely see anymore. Well, I only travel between here and my home, so I can manage with just my cane."

"..."

"But there are some things I can tell. So why the tearful atmosphere? Did something happen?"

This person might know.

She might know things Tselika did not about the man who had met his end in Grandnir.

"I came to visit someone who lived here..."

She just about added, "Even though I know that isn't possible."

But the old woman smiled even wider.

"Well, why didn't you say so sooner? That can only mean 'him'. After all, all the other residents have moved out and there has been talk of rebuilding

this old place, but I can't bring myself to tear it down when there's still one person continuing to pay his rent."

"You mean...?"

Could it be?

"He was a strange person. I can't tell if he's poor or rich. He lives in such a run-down apartment, but then he paid me 100 years' worth of rent in advance. So now I feel like I have to keep the place around even though he's disappeared. I couldn't imagine why he would stay here if he had that kind of money, but I feel like that mystery has finally been solved."

She wanted to know as much as possible.

This old woman claimed to be nearly blind and yet able to read people's emotions, so she spoke the answer before Tselika could ask the question.

"I mean, he would always say the view of the cherry blossoms from his window here was the best. He always said he wanted to bring his future wife to see them."

She was speechless.

She could not help herself.

Tselika collapsed to the ground, rubbed her forehead against the damp dirt, and wept. The action was done through the star student, so it may have been the greatest desecration, but she still felt that coming here had been worth it.

That man had kept his promise.

It had only been a verbal promise and he had decayed away in another world, but he had still kept it.

If he had not lost his life, Tselika would not have been so dead set on crossing between worlds.

“Are the cherry blossoms out?” asked the old lady. “I can’t tell with my bad eyes, but they sometimes bloom out of season. Are they doing that today?”

Tselika raised her tear and dirt-stained face.

Her vision was too blurry with tears to tell.

And.

She had her own objective.

“...Finally.”

No matter how tightly she shut her lips, she could not stop that word from escaping.

She hid her expression behind her bangs and spoke it even more clearly.

“Finally.”

The blue scorpion armor binding Gruagach began to glow with a pale light. The red pincers pushing up on her modest breasts opened. And something small spilled out.

It was just a few hairs.

She had brought them here by directly building them into the Shining Weapon that would travel between worlds. Those few grams could accomplish the miracle that Tselika herself could not. This was the result of the experiment that person had risked his life for.

“I’ve finally come to see the cherry blossoms with you. Isn’t that right, you great fool?”

Humans could freely travel between Earth and Grandnir, but what they could bring back was limited.

Once they became a corpse, humans too became a “thing”, so they could not use the Gate.

So the white nun had wanted to fulfill his final regret no matter what it took.

She had wanted to see the cherry blossoms with him.

That dream required ignoring the most basic assumptions about traveling between the 2 worlds.

It did not matter how twisted it had to be or how little anyone else would understand.

Yes, she had arrived with a few hairs from his head using the special trait of the Shining Weapon built into the other Shining Weapon that was created from his armor and could travel between the 2 worlds.

She had questioned herself time and again.

Was there really nothing she could do for the dead and was this nothing more than self-satisfaction? What would it actually change to see some plant with her own eyes? What meaning was there in a few hairs?

When the Religious Society and the Break News had attacked her church, she had been willing to accept her fate if she lost control of the situation and was killed there. She would go to be with him either way, so she would be happy regardless.

But Tselika had come this far.

She had the skill needed to execute all the necessary plans and she had devilish luck to back it up.

All of that had come together in this result.

“Would you...?”

“Yes?”

“Would you give me permission to bury this below the cherry tree?”

This was an unnecessary process. She could have simply kept the hairs with her to remember him.

But she did not. She would only indulge herself this far.

She alone had committed this sin.

So she had never planned to have him with her to the end.

She had known she needed to cut him away from her evil at some point.

And the old woman who had more or less been a grave keeper smiled and nodded.

“Of course. I don’t know your circumstances, but I can tell you put a lot of work into this.”

This time, Tselika really did bawl like a small child despite her alluring body.

She had been given permission to complete every last selfish part of her plan.

She had not had permission for everything she had done and the title of sinner would remain on her head, but she felt like she had reached the summit of one mountain.

(It will all be okay now.)

In human units, the blue scorpion armor had only been able to hide a few grams.

That meant only a few hairs she could hold between her fingers. This demon had brought chaos to 2 worlds and accepted any and all blasphemies for nothing more than that. And she had successfully made that wish come true.

She looked to the cherry blossoms.

With him, she viewed the flowers he had spoken of with such delight to the very, very end. She shared them with him.

She would accept all the sin from here. So she would cut him away as they shared this happy memory.

This was a farewell ritual.

(It's over. It's all over. So become one with the cherry blossoms in my heart, my beloved.)

No matter what happened now, no one would be able to trample over him. Still on her knees, she used Gruagach's arms to dig a shallow hole in the soil dirt below the old tree, place the few hairs inside, and pile the soil back over them. She then gently patted the top like she was soothing a small child.

"One thing."

"Hm? What is it?"

"Can you promise me one thing? You are going to hear some loud noises, but do not worry about anything. The noises might surprise you, but please do not leave this place."

The ritual she had been so desperate to carry out was complete.

The sexy demon wiped the tears from her eyes and turned around along with the star student she had hijacked.

“I must thank you for waiting until I was done.”

“ — — — — — ”

A twintail girl in a red dress was waiting for her.

Her appearance might have changed, but Tselika immediately saw through it. This was one of the level cap adventurers who represented the strongest of the humans. It was Holy Swordswoman Beatrice.

She understood that, but the demon still sneered.

She no longer needed a kind expression.

Tselika removed her focus from the old woman in the space behind her and she faced her enemy.

“You’ve done what you came here for. Are you willing to obediently return to Grandnir?”

“It’s true I have done my duty, but after causing this much chaos, the humans will hunt me down through pure numbers even if I do return. Grandnir is a small place. Running back there will only place the noose around my own neck.”

“Meaning?”

“I will remain here. I will remain and go into hiding. Can you leave me be now that I have kept true to my promise?”

“Do you realize your life won’t last long either way?”

When humans stayed in another world for too long, the slight differences in gravity and the atmosphere had grave mental and physical effects, especially in relation to their internal clock. But Tselika was too accustomed to Grandnir, so the same problems would occur if she remained on Earth. Even if she was technically not on Earth and only interfering through the thin layer between Earth and Grandnir, her eyes and ears perceived Tokyo. That meant she would be affected the same as if she were actually in Tokyo.

But translucent Tselika embraced Gruagach's neck all the same.

The red plug on the long tail stabbed into the poor victim's back.

The demon then buried her face in the nape of Gruagach's neck, a glowing emblem passed across her flesh, and the last vestiges of resistance entirely vanished.

She had been remade into a killer puppet.

"That is none of your concern, human."

"Is that so?"

The girl could not use Magic.

Unless she was armed with a sword or an arrow, she was no more than a slender young girl.

"Then I won't hold back."

But Tselika nearly looked away from her eyes.

That was just how much pressure was contained in those eyes.

"I don't know what kind of life plan you've put together. It doesn't matter if you're greedily looking for luxury or if you're only hoping to find some small happiness."

They seemed to burn with flames.

It felt like they would scorch Tselika's skin if the girl approached. Not to mention if she touched them.

"Boo Boo said he wanted everyone to get along. Nun, you were part of that. But you used those feelings, deceived him, and betrayed him. If this is what you call a success, then I definitely need to fight you."

"..."

"Just as you made an enemy of the world for someone important to you, I've come here and made an enemy of the world for someone important to me. So there's no rejecting this duel now."

Tselika laughed.

It was an extremely calm laugh that seemed mismatched for a demon with large horns.

"Honestly. It seems we've both gone through a lot for our hopeless men."

"No." The red dress girl immediately cut her off. "He's the greatest guy I've ever met in either world."

Part 10

No matter what her reasons were and no matter how much willpower she mustered, there was nothing the red dress girl could do.

She could not use Magic and she was not skilled in sword fighting. She was up against a full-powered Summon Hunter and the Succubus fully controlling her. She was entirely powerless against a paranormal being like Tselika with her angel halo and demon horns.

"Filinion and Armelina."

Several sticky tentacle-like objects shot out from the shadow at Gruagach's feet. She stabbed them with the lower blade attached to the bow, the monster was stored within the bow, and it was absorbed into the arrowhead of the arrow she pulled from the quiver at her hip. Then she raised the stabilizer-equipped bow.

Definite power resided within it as she took aim.

As the tentacle creature awaited orders, its killer intent pierced the red dress girl right between the eyes.

"Why do you think I mentioned those names? And why do you think you arrived in time? What do you think happened to them in exchange for the time they bought you?"

"!!"

The long black twintail girl did not hesitate.

Instead of rushing at her foe, she moved back. She tried to put distance between them.

"You fawn. Did you think you could escape the hunter's bow by leaping across the mountain!?"

Tselika mercilessly activated the Magic and tentacles surged out from the arrowhead.

The arrow targeted the girl with movements more akin to swimming than flying. No arrow could fly like this. The arrowhead would accurately pierce her flesh and the many tentacles would burst out inside her to crush her organs in their grasp. There was no escaping this attack which could crush even a mass of steel just as thick.

Or it would have turned out that way.

Assuming, that is, frightening scarlet flames had not burst out when the red dress girl swung her hand.

The flames struck the tentacle arrow.

Its path was slightly diverted and it flew right past the girl's face.

"What...?"

Tselika's eyes widened as she had her puppet nock another arrow.

"What was that? You shouldn't be able to use Magic!!"

As if trying to correct some kind of mistake, she stabbed the bow's blade into the monsters growing at her feet and released them. This time it was a Harpy, an incarnation of the wind who snatched people's souls away. It split into 10 partway through and moved to accurately pierce the red dress girl's vitals from 10 different angles.

But even that failed to reach her.

The girl took a small step and swung her right hand both vertically and horizontally. With each swing, red flames filled that space. The explosions diverted the killer arrows, sending them every which way but toward her.

This was no time for Tselika to avoid the reality before her eyes by deeming it "impossible".

And no matter how much she worked Gruagach's mind, she could find no way for a mere human to use Magic here on Earth. That was something only Tselika could do. That was why she should have been unstoppable. Nothing else made sense, and yet this red dress girl had torn down those assumptions.

Tselika heard a whistling sound.

She finally started observing her surroundings. The twintail girl was holding what seemed to be a metal measuring tape. She had it extended to a few meters and she had swung it around like a whip.

And once Tselika stepped outside of the dirt yard, she sensed an odd smell. Gruagach's knowledge told her it could be flammable.

"Don't tell me..."

"It's true I can't use Magic," said the girl while raising the metal measuring tape she used to produce fire-starting sparks. "But I know more about the traits and nature of fire than anyone. And if I have a way of creating flames without Magic, then I can control it even more easily than my own fingers."

Invisible flammable gas.

Different such gases had different traits. Some were heavier than air, others lighter. Some dissolved into water, others did not. Some burned, others exploded. By understanding all that and combining them, what looked like empty space could become a labyrinth of flames.

Yes.

"If you can see inside her head, are you familiar with Hollywood movies?"

"..."

"Using CG for everything looks too fake, so real stunts and explosions are coming back into style. And by controlling the direction of the blast with metal panels and air compressors, they can make a clear division between flames and a safe zone down to a few dozen centimeters. As long as you know each of the individual traits, you can cause an explosion in a public square and yet leave everyone but your target entirely unharmed."

The metal measuring tape danced around the girl like a living creature once more.

And this time it was not for defense.

“It’s almost like magic.”

Explosion after explosion erupted out.

It was now Tselika’s turn to use Magic for defense while controlling the star student. A circular shield of light appeared in front of the raised bow, but the dress girl pushed forward nonetheless. She pushed and pushed and pushed and pushed.

(Dammit! There’s no knowledge on this inside Gruagach! You useless girl!!)

“Kh.”

The star student bound by blue scorpion armor was lifted a bit from the ground.

As if to cut in, the red dress girl swung the metal measuring tape down like a whip.

“Nitric acid is an oxidant and alcohol is a flammable liquid. We found both in the freight train’s tanks.”

The slightest spark would blow away the world around them.

Meaning...

“Combining the two gives you rocket fuel. Is that enough for your feeble brain to catch up?”

Blinding flashes of light danced around them.

Tselika clenched her teeth, manipulated Gruagach through the blue scorpion armor, and tried to use Magic to somehow pin her feet to the ground.

But it was too late.

The long black twintail girl swung the metal measuring tape once more, a nearby fire hydrant was blown away in the explosion, and a great torrent of water erupted out.

“The white cloud you see in the footage of a rocket launch isn’t smoke,” said the girl who was calm enough to smile a little by this point. “It’s the steam created by the coolant water used to ensure the engine and launch equipment aren’t destroyed by the great heat. Although that’s known as a steam explosion and is quite dangerous in its own way.”

She used that to be extra certain.

The pressure quickly grew and crossed a certain line. Gruagach in her blue scorpion armor and translucent Tselika in her scale swimsuit were pushed back by the incredible force and sent flying like a meteor. They flew from the outdoor road and into a nearby complex building that acted as a landmark. They shattered the glass door and rolled on inside.

“Ghah! Gbhahh!! Heh heh heh, ha ha ha ha ha ha!!”

The star student’s pain reached translucent Tselika, but she overwrote it as pleasure as a form of anesthesia and then forced Gruagach to her feet.

No matter what tricks she used, that red dress girl was not the same as the monstrous level cap Holy Swordswoman. She was no more than a slender, frail, and defenseless human. If Tselika faced her directly without being deceived, she would win. She only had to use Gruagach as a Summon

Hunter and summon a Kraken or a Scylla. Then she could crush that girl like wringing juice from a fruit.

But what happened next was something else unexpected.

Something slid along the well-polished floor. Tselika looked cautiously over in that direction and saw a card-sized electronic device. Gruagach's knowledge told her what it was.

(A smartphone? They insert their Shining Weapon into that to convert their Experience Points.)

A moment later, she heard a mechanical beeping noise and red light appeared in the space around her. The light formed a perfect 2 meter square around Tselika and extended upwards as a pillar.

"I sent a signal to the other side."

Tselika suddenly realized where this was.

"When a Sign In or Sign Out fails, the Gate produces a warning signal both on Earth and in Grandnir. This signal will have reached the other side. And Boo Boo just has to notice that."

"You...can't mean..."

If you carelessly used a wireless hotspot disguising itself as a public wireless LAN, you could allow access to your smartphone despite its security settings and that would allow someone to mess with your Experience Points. So it was best to turn off the feature that automatically searched for hotspots. Everyone received frequent warning emails about that.

And Iroka, the eldest of the 3 maid sisters, could easily decode digitally encrypted police radio signals or remotely control normal smartphones.

She could control Tselika's device whether she liked it or not.

The Shining Weapon armor was not shaped like a USB key, but no one – not even Tselika – knew what would happen if the mobile device it worked through was destroyed. This was unsurprising when they were working in entirely unexplored territory. And this was not something to test out on the fly. It was not just Gruagach on the chopping block here. The same was true of Tselika as she clung to the girl through the thin barrier between worlds.

"The Sign In process takes 2 to 3 minutes to complete."

The red dress girl stepped forward and swung the metal measuring tape through the air like a whip.

And she recalled Boo Boo's face when he had happily said the Nun had not run from him after seeing him in the forest.

"I will hold you here until then. I will send Gruagach and you back to Grandnir. You can apologize to Boo Boo there. It's time you saw the face of the one who's crying more than anyone else, Tselika!!"

Part 11

"Tch."

Translucent Tselika clicked her tongue with both an angel's halo and a demon's horns on her head.

That Iberian Orc was nothing but direct physical strength, so it was especially devastating for him to be waiting beyond the Gate. Once Gruagach was sent back to Grandnir, Tselika would lose her anchor and she would return from the edge of the ever-expanding universe. Once that happened, she could easily be taken out with a single blow.

[illegible]

And that was why the radiant white demon cast everything aside.

She would stab the scorpion tail's red plug into Gruagach's back, kiss her nape, and use the Summon Hunter's Magic to summon a giant Kraken or Scylla. She could seal them into an arrow or have them rampage through the giant complex to bring the entire building down from within. Either way, the destruction would reach the red dress girl with the force of a surging tidal wave. And that would sweep everything away.

But the girl did not take a single step back. The 3 maids in charge of distributing the flammable gasses supported her as she swung the metal measuring tape in every direction to slice through the air and strike the walls or floor, creating sparks. More and more explosions were triggered and the surging dance of flames cut off the radiant white demon's escape.

She did not need to defeat the great monster.

The red dress girl's role was not to get an attack in on Tselika.

She only had to keep her here for 2 to 3 minutes. She only had to hold her own position for 120 to 180 seconds. As long as she held firm for that long, the Gate would swiftly send Gruagach and Tselika back to Grandnir.

The rest was Boo Boo's job.

That way he could rid himself of his regret, make up for everything, and smile freely once more.

She would endure these fierce attacks, block the way like a thick slab of stone, and push back as hard as it took!!

This attack came from someone else: an adult woman wearing glasses and a tight skirt suit whose long hair was worn up. Her appearance had changed quite a bit, but the weapon she used was enough to recognize her.

“Are you Armelina!?”

“You didn’t come that conclusion after looking at my chest, did you? Anyway, she comes first. You’re sending her to Grandnir with a forced Sign In, right!? Let’s get on with it and end this!!”

Those 2 were far from unscathed.

The unnatural way they supported their body weight suggested they were injured and Tselika had hinted as much earlier. They had likely lost once already.

Nevertheless, they had stood back up. They had come this far to assist the twintail girl. Even if it meant clenching their teeth, dragging their heavy bodies along, and hiding the blood below their clothing.

They had made it at the very end.

So the red dress girl only had to accept it.

She only had to accept their feelings.

The help from those 2 friends changed the momentum of the clash.

And the red dress girl had not been fighting alone in the first place. She was supported by the 3 maids who would accurately carry out whatever instructions they were given.

And with everyone’s help, she once more pushed back against the isolated dictator!!

“Does it hurt?” The red dress girl whispered while explosive flames and arrows of light flew back and forth. “This might be a hackneyed and useless line, but I’ll use it on you regardless: That person who died before your eyes wouldn’t have wanted you to do this.”

“Don’t you dare act like you understand him!!”

“Did that clichéd argument sting? Is it hard hearing that kind of idealism? But that’s as good as a confession that you’ve strayed far enough from the straight and narrow for it to hurt you!!”

This twintail girl had almost done the same once.

She had almost turned everything to ashes in order to kill the leader of Elkiad, a collection of delinquent soldiers who had tried to make a mess of Boo Boo’s past and future.

It was Boo Boo who had confronted her at the very end then.

Nothing could have been more painful than finding him standing in her way, but not because of his great strength as an Iberian Orc.

Somewhere in her heart, she had known. She had known that she had no argument that would defeat his as he stood directly in her path.

“He never would have wanted you to dirty your hands! He never would have wanted you to bring chaos to both worlds! He definitely would have wanted you to be happy!! Now, if you know a greater truth than that, then out with it, Tselika!! Don’t look down! Look me in the eye and tell me!! This isn’t a vote where majority rules and we aren’t obeying a passage in some ancient text. Search your heart and tell me what you find there! Can you tell me he was someone who would have wanted to accomplish his goal even if it meant you had to dirty your hands!? Can you tell me he was someone

who would have said there was no sight in your Grandnir prettier than those cherry blossoms!?"

"...!?"



“Lady Sutriona, what is Boo Boo doing?”

“Across Grandnir, there is a nearly limitless supply of those Gates the humans use. He is likely determining where to wait for the enemy.”

“Oh, so it’s a kind of fortunetelling? That’s surprisingly romantic for Boo Boo.”

That was how the Fairy interpreted it, but Sutriona saw things differently as she stood on a tree branch.

(A slide rule, hm? But it doesn’t look like it’s made for simple function calculations. It is quite irregular.)

The inn town humans had lamented the lack of calculators and computers beyond primitive resistors that used gears and ugly keys, but she had occasionally seen them using these instead of Magic or Shining Weapons. Some of them chose not to use Magic outside of the Labyrinth as a matter of principle. And she had heard that people had made calculations for astronomy, pharmaceuticals, steam engine cruise ships, and dams that held massive water pressure with only a slide rule back in a pre-computer age.

Boo Boo would not be relying entirely on the slide rule he held.

He would be making thousands or even millions of calculations in his head before moving one of the wooden panels. By repeating the process, he could complete a large job in pieces.

So what was he going to all this trouble to calculate?

With this much calculation power, he could likely accurately locate a ring thrown into the ocean.

Once he had the answer, he stood up and muttered something to no one in particular.

“Beatrice should come from there.”

He had calculated out the truth.

That just left the color of the gate to prove him right.

Part 13

It was truly over in an instant.

Everything danced before her eyes. The scenery changed. The atmosphere changed to something quite familiar. That almost biologically forced calm upon her, but this was no time for that.

She heard a heavy noise from straight ahead.

The star student’s vision was filled by a thick round mass.

That round mass was the last of the Iberian Orcs carrying a giant Shining Weapon that could be mistaken for a log or steel beam.

“Ah.”

She did not have time to say anything.

As previously established, it was over in an instant.

So...

Claaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaang!!!!

It was a full horizontal swing.

The blue scorpion armor was smashed to pieces as he scored a grand slam.

Tselika's Parchment Negotiation Material She Never Got to Use!

1: How to Overcome the Mental and Physical Changes of Another World

The slight differences in the planetary rotation, gravity, and atmosphere between Earth and Grandnir have serious mental and physical effects on visitors who stay for long periods of time. But I am a Succubus, one who leads people astray. If I Charm myself with the appropriately tuned values in advance, I can readjust my physiological rhythm and resolve this problem.

This method is only possible for a Succubus and only understood by me because I spent so much time only able to watch as he wasted away in Grandnir, unable to Sign Out. I tried everything I could and failed, so I believe I know the structure of the human body better than anyone.

2: How to Create a Shining Weapon That Has Been Twisted Like a Mobius Strip

I gradually modified his armor. I did so in order to place his hairs inside it, contact it through the thin barrier between worlds, and see the cherry blossoms with him. As a secondary effect, the Shining Weapon's full power can be used in both Earth and Grandnir and the human I have hijacked as a slave device can summon other Nonhumans just like me. But this armor uses techniques and laws unique to Grandnir. Only someone who had spent as much time and agony on the issue as me would be able to reach this answer, but since a normal human would wither away both mentally and physically after only a few days, I doubt anyone else will ever reach this level.

However, the method found in #1 could solve that problem.

(This would generally only increase the risk of an invasion of Earth from Grandnir, so I doubt anyone would even try, but it would not surprise me if someone tried to tear off biological parts of the Nonhumans as a stepping stone to technological advancement on the same level as the Pieces.)

3: How to Control My Own Soul Using the Scorpion Armor and the Blood Oil.

I will avoid putting this section to writing. I only need that knowledge in my own head.

This is a contract to buy back a soul.

Simply unrolling the parchment is the same as admitting defeat and letting a mere human defang me.

I would rather bite my own tongue than spill my blood to rely on this.

Tselika Wien Alpha Chelydia Lumidrier

Epilogue

Once it was over, it almost seemed too easy.

Tselika and possessed Gruagach had vanished from Earth.

The Krakens and Scyllas they had released into the city had still been crawling around, but they had likely been held here by the Summon Hunter. With their master gone, the monsters rampaging through the city had also vanished into thin air.

Once the threat was gone, things moved quickly.

The world-class city with more than 10 million residents swiftly resumed functioning.

“Boo,” said Boo Boo when Beatrice visited to Grandnir to report on the situation. “Beatrice, I picked up that Gruagach person. Humans will damage their body if they stay here too long, so get her back to her world.”

“Thanks, Boo Boo.”

Gruagach had her own circumstances and her body had been hijacked through the blue scorpion armor, but she was not exactly innocent. They were sure to find plenty of new facts if they looked into how she had gained her connection to Tselika.

That said, it would be too much to leave her to the devastation of Grandnir.

It would be best if she returned to Earth, atoned for her crimes, and recovered from there.

“By the way, Beatrice. I noticed something strange.”

“Yeah?”

Boo Boo tilted his head and did not stop there.

“When I picked up Gruagach, that Tselika person wasn’t there,” he explained.

“ ... ”

“Since she was being pulled toward your world by Gruagach, maybe she landed somewhere else after letting go of Gruagach.”

The Detached Magic Palace was a cleared area in the center of Roppongi, Tokyo.

With the commotion over, the 3 of them gathered in one place once more.

“Given my job, I’d really prefer to avoid anything that stands out so much,” sighed the glasses woman in a tight skirt.

The only one looking more uncomfortable than her was the fluffy blonde coke bottle glasses shrine maiden.

“You never told me you were working with the police or an external sector or whatever. I kind of fired a gun right in front of you, so what’s going to happen to me now?”

“That’s part of what this meeting is about. And I see both of you wear glasses.” The red dress girl winked. “Well, you saw how badly the JSDF and riot police failed. They won’t want to dig their own graves, so I seriously doubt they’ll do any real investigation into what happened during all that.”

“To be blunt, you’re the one in the most dangerous position here.” The tight skirt woman sounded exasperated. “Most of the problems will be swept under the rug, but the Information Broker group isn’t going to turn a blind

eye to this. The red Holy Swordswoman left the Detached Magic Palace without a central vote granting permission. Something's bound to happen, so be careful."

"That's my problem."

The long black twintail girl shrugged and moved onto the next topic.

Seeing that, the fluffy blonde glasses shrine maiden and the tight suit woman both bowed.

They went past 45 degrees for a full 90 degrees.

"Sorry for everything!!"

"I won't use my job as an excuse. I deceived you either way!!"

But the red dress girl only sighed.

"Deceived me? But I never told you everything about myself either. Like that I was confined to the Detached Magic Palace. It's not like I wasn't hiding anything. You'd just investigated it yourselves and tricked yourselves into thinking I was blameless, right?"

"But...but I reported on Boo Boo. I even mentioned the secret of his Shining Weapon and the souls of the Iberian Orcs! That has to be your biggest weakness!!"

"It doesn't really matter if people know that."

"Um, to get an idea of how powerful you are, I secretly measured the Percentage-style Magic you wear...and that means I gave them your measurements. Like your chest size!"

"Okay, let's take this outside, cow."

There was the occasional piercing comment, but it was generally peaceful.

They already trusted each other.

Small cracks like this were not enough to break that trust.

“More importantly, I want to ask about Tselika.”

“She was a fake, you know?”

With that comment, the busty shrine maiden pulled out her smartphone so the others could see.

It displayed the information site she ran.

“The Succubus name is just something the humans gave her, so she isn’t actually one. She’s a similar race that lives in Grandnir, so don’t forget that not all the legends found on Earth are going to apply.”

“Yes, yes. Can we move on?”

“Apparently, most demons don’t have a physical body. And that includes the major demons like Lord Satan and Lord Beelzebub. That’s why they either hijack a human body or whisper in people’s ears to tempt them into evil deeds. Well, that’s the interpretation anyway.”

“Yeah? And that’s why Tselika used that armor and that blood oil to control that twisted star student named...what is it? Gruagach?”

“Yes,” confirmed the shrine maiden with her fluffy blonde hair tied back in a long tube shape. “But that explanation doesn’t hold for a certain type of demon: the Succubus. Those demons do evil by...um, well, uh...sleeping with humans, so they can’t fulfill their role without a physical body of their own, right?”

“Huh...?”

“A variety of theories have been proposed at religious councils, but the standard ones are that they create a temporary body in some way or that they can choose at will to be tangible or intangible.”

In that case...

An unpleasant silence fell over the 3 of them.

“What if Tselika was able to maintain a physical body with enough power to continue interfering with Earth through the thin barrier even without using Gruagach as an anchor?”

“Are you saying she might have escaped just before that star student was thrown through the Gate...?”

That was only one possibility.

There was no basis to it.

They would not allow it to be true.

It was simply known as the conference room.

It had no grand title and it was not assigned a number.

It had no luxurious chairs or desks and not fancy interior decoration. Not even a single bottle of tea was provided. In fact, even the rectangular space did not really exist.

It was no more than a community on a secret network.

It was used by liaison councils so that recovery preparations could be swiftly made if any sudden and devastating damage were done to Tokyo by

a disaster or other emergency. It was essentially the electronic version of decentralization.

But some had found other value in its anonymity and it had become a den of evil.

“We can put off recovery operations for the capital until later.”

“The topic at hand is how to deal with Holy Swordswoman Beatrice.”

“That was not good at all.”

“This problem is on the same level as suddenly losing contact with a submarine carrying a nuke. Depending on how the other nations interpret this, the tension could reach the breaking point.”

The speakers had no names and were not assigned numbers. They gave no thought to each other’s identities or influence. That was what allowed them to have a fair vote without laying out all sorts of groundwork first.

It did not matter who was speaking.

They only cared that they arrived at the correct answer.

They had none of the cheap pride of someone who felt joy in showing off their knowledge.

“Then what shall we do? Disposing of her would be a loss for the nation.”

“She is meaningless if she cannot be controlled.”

“The five great regional cities have found their next candidates: an Ice Waterfall Princess and a Noble Dancer. Leaving this to them is always an option.”

“We cannot decide that so easily.”

“That is what the conference room is for. Let us vote, as always.”

An anonymous vote was much like abandoning responsibility.

Even if the result was a failure, they could not be personally criticized. They had all made the decision together, which softened any guilt they might feel.

That allowed them to present bolder opinions without fear, but it also introduced the danger of turning toward more extreme and escalated opinions without giving them the appropriate thought.

Policy was leaning toward abandoning the people of Tokyo and building up more regional areas, but that may have been the influence of this conference room.

“Tselika’s plan could never have reached fruition if Beatrice had not acted.”

“She has been carrying out her duty of gathering Pieces for the benefit of Japan. I was willing to turn a blind eye if she had a little bit of fun, but this is too much.”

“I am also concerned about the Iberian Orc who is in contact with her.”

“I heard that the Shining Weapon that Nonhuman carries has his fellow Iberian Orcs’ souls stored inside as data. That is an irregularity equal to or even greater than Tselika.”

“That too could lead to Nonhumans crossing between the 2 worlds.”

“Should we confiscate it?”

“How about we leave that to Beatrice? As a way to make up for her own crime.”

The irresponsible exchange began shifting in a certain direction and reached its completion when a cruel essence began to grow. Just like always. And no one questioned the way things were developing.

They were all chuckling in front of monitors separated by great distances, but there was no real meaning to this.

They had no idea that their conversation was being monitored with all of their real names attached.

(Now, then. I need to keep those idiots talking themselves in endless circles like always.)

They saw themselves as kings, but god would not let them look down on others.

That privilege was something god lent to the king.

(Messing with Beatrice now would be foolish to the extreme. Why would they start another fire when Tselika's conflagration still hasn't been completely put out? I will admit these people are geniuses when it comes to exasperating an old woman like me. As usual.)

If those intrusive and influential people were given important-looking chairs to sit at, they would gladly enter the cage. And while their entirely meaningless discussions bought some time, the old woman only had to casually guide their opinions to turn them into the perfect puppets. They could hold a 4-hour meeting and be guided to an answer in the last 5 minutes and yet never question it, so it was impressive in a way.

(What are you going to do now, Tselika Wien Alpha Chelydia Lumidrier? The delayed recovery of the city really hurt us. Particularly the surveillance network. That's how she managed to disappear.)

Several messages danced within the email software displayed in another frame on the screen.

They had been sent to the Ushigashira Shrine.

They were discussing a dinner party for the Yokohama Summit.

“The G22... The leaders of 22 leading and developing nations. Has she attached herself to one of them?”

If that happened, they would not be able to simply gather up anyone suspicious in a sort of witch hunt. The false accusations would develop into international incidents and this country would become isolated. But if nothing was done and all those leaders returned home, it would be difficult to reach Tselika. If she controlled the leader of a great nation that influenced international society as a whole, she could slowly tighten her grip on Japan from a safe zone and she would have no reason to stay in one place. If she continued moving from person to person while ignoring the pyramid structure of human society, it would be impossible to capture her.

(But that’s only if she remains 100% wary of humans. If we let her go this time, she might get carried away and make a mistake. I even have the perfect bait for her with the conference room.)

The old woman thought coldly but then sighed.

Instead of her enemy, her thoughts turned to a carefree person: a shrine maiden with fluffy blonde hair and coke bottle glasses.

“Enjoy the time you have, demon lord. But even if I have to use the conference room as a breakwater and even if I have to sacrifice myself, I will not let you reach the shrine maiden princess.”

It was a moonlit evening.

A red dress girl slowly walked around the large garden after finishing dinner. Her smartphone had received a message from an unknown sender.

The account's image icon was a cherry blossom petal.

"Hello, Holy Swordswoman. I'm just going to assume you already know it's impossible to send messages from Grandnir."

"..."

Since she was confined to the Detached Magic Palace, the girl's internet environment was also monitored, but this message had been sent despite that. The sender was either an idiot or protected by something even greater than this nation's monitoring system.

"How?"

"Even I was surprised. I honestly had no plan once I lost Gruagach. I never imagined something else would anchor me here."

Beatrice had asked the maids to investigate that after the fact.

"That" being what Tselika had buried below a certain cherry tree.

"Did you find his hairs?"

She did not answer.

"They decompose so quickly, don't they? Was it the dirt, the bugs, or the water? Did they reach an underground vein of water, or did they turn to vapor and enter the atmosphere? That anchor has dispersed too much for anyone to locate it now. And that is why I can remain here forever. All while I possess person after person."

The girl could do nothing as the answers kept coming.

“I achieved my goal. You got in my way, Beatrice, but I never could have crossed between worlds without your help. Although it would seem my plan to fake my death just wasn’t good enough. Still, you helped me more than you hindered me, so I decided to thank you directly.”

This device was being monitored.

It would be meaningless to ask to have the signal traced. If Tselika could not be located in this environment, there was nothing else they could do.

“What do you plan to do?”

“I wanted to stand before the cherry blossoms with his hairs. But now that I have completed that top priority, more and more desires are rising within me. I think I will enjoy a comfortable life. Rest easy, Beatrice. I will have nothing more to do with you. I will not hound you forever and ever.”

It was in fact the red dress girl who had business with Tselika.

By sending her influence through the thin barrier between worlds, Tselika had rampaged through Tokyo without actually crossing that barrier, but to prepare for that, she had placed her soul and traces of herself inside Gruagach’s armor and soft skin, had Gruagach pass through the Gate, and intentionally let the filter between worlds catch her soul.

Which meant one thing: she had achieved the twintail girl’s final objective.

Namely, to retrieve the Iberian Orc souls from Boo Boo’s Shining Weapon, give them physical bodies, and free them.

Tselika had a portion of the answer.

“It’s no use. Give up on capturing me and getting me to talk. My technique is mine and mine alone. I will not let even the greatest nation touch *that crystallization of what I created for him*. But it is possible. You need to find satisfaction in that information alone.”

The cherry blossom petal message seemed to answer the girl’s questions in advance.

That would be another reason why Tselika was remaining on Earth instead of returning to Grandnir where she could be hunted down by pure numbers. It was not for her own safety but to ensure the technique connected to her memories was not stolen.

And the red dress girl realized she hoped that was the case.

If it was, she would not have to despise that demon.

“I don’t really gain anything from this. I just wanted to present a bit of a question to you.”

“Just get to the point,” urged the girl.

“Passing between worlds sounds simple enough, but it is more than just an issue of distance. And I have heard whisperings of an interesting theory in this world: the theory of relativity. It would seem that time and distance are closely related.”

The message was just text, but it carried real emotion.

It contained some amusement but also some anger.

“Then doesn’t the technology to transcend that distance also carry the possibility of interfering with that other closely-related concept? Namely, time. His home was covered in shadows and run down. But was that really due to the cruelty of this world? Is it also possible that there was a barrier of

time as well as space when passing between worlds? That possibility scares me a little.”

“Time...”

“Then again, that doesn’t really hold up when you look at it from a causality perspective. And I technically haven’t really traveled between worlds, so you should assume I have no idea what I’m talking about. That said, it is possible those Gates could be used for something entirely different if the conditions were right.”

Tselika had likely lost interest.

Just as she had arrived without warning, she ended the conversation without warning.

Just like a cherry blossom that scattered into the wind even though everyone wished it could stay in bloom forever.

But first she left one final message:

“Be careful. If you let your guard down, someone you trust might trip you up when you least expect it. Just like this demon did.”

Round Boo Boo was small and looked like a stuffed animal. He was in high spirits this morning. Everyone was afraid of the Iberian Orcs, but he still had a friend. When he was with her, he would lose track of time.

The friend he had met in the forest was named Beatrice.

“Boo Boo. Do you want to go deeper into the forest today? There’s a waterfall that creates a big rainbow and we can catch a ton of fish there.”

“Let’s go, let’s go!! Fish are hard to eat with all their little bones, but I’ve heard catching lots of fish means you’ve grown up!!”

“Boo Boo. The nobler sign of growing up is that you have someone who will make food for you and who will be waiting for you to come home.”

“But I want to learn how to hunt. If I can catch my own food, then I’ve really grown up. And then I can make lunches for you, Beatrice!”

With that decided, he had to go get his fishing pole.

Unfortunately, he could not tell Beatrice about the Iberian Orc village. Not only its location but also that they even lived as a group like that. The village was located quite near the Labyrinth’s entrance, but only they knew about its existence. Once everyone in the village knew more about Beatrice and accepted that she was a good person, they were sure to give permission.

So Boo Boo returned to the village alone, grabbed a fishing pole, and turned right back around.

He met someone on the way.

She wore red armor.

She wore a giant Shining Weapon on her back that could be mistaken for a log or steel beam.

She had the sexy bodylines of an adult woman and her silver and red hair fluttered behind her.

“...”

Most humans responded with fear when they saw Boo Boo or the other Iberian Orcs. Some would even throw stones. Since everyone in the village

told him they were panicking rather than angry, he could not hate them for it, but it did make him sad. He really wished he did not have to feel like this before going to play with Beatrice.

However, she did not seem bothered by seeing him.

For some reason, she looked sad even though she was smiling.

“Get going. Hurry along.”

She gently moved aside so Boo Boo could continue down the path with his fishing pole in both hands.

“Go be with your friend before the circle closes.”

He may have been overthinking it.

There may have been no displeasure on her face.

But when he calmly observed her, he felt like she was barely containing something inside her.

“Are you okay?”

“...”

“You look like you’re about to cry. I’ve never seen someone look like that. I know what to do if you have a stomachache or a toothache. There are a lot of different fruits and caterpillars in the forest and you can combine them into a medicine.”

But nothing more happened when he walked closer.

The red armor woman said nothing more, turned her back, and left.

Boo Boo tilted his head.

“I guess she didn’t have a stomachache or toothache.”

That was his conclusion.

Beatrice had to be waiting for him, so he started running with fishing pole in hand.

What would have happened if he had questioned that encounter?

Why had that woman been on a secret animal trail no human had been told about?

And if she was headed in the opposite direction, did that mean she was on her way to the village?

Meanwhile, the red armor woman carrying a large sword felt a tightness in her chest.

But she continued walking along the animal trail. That was all she did. She could not look back given what she was about to do. And if she did look back, the others would notice.

That was when she heard a rustling in the surrounding bushes.

Those people would not do so by mistake. They were elites that had received the standardized training of an allied nation. That meant this was an intentional signal to tell her they were there. They were telling her they were not enemies and everything was going as planned.

The circle around the village had closed.

Now no one could escape.

"I assume you're the Elkiad I was told about."

When she responded vocally, a man stepped out of the bushes to answer in kind. The gray-haired man was their leader. Even at his age and even with the dignity he had built up, he still could not leave these dangerous scenes. That man who had married war laughed and answered her in a deep voice.

“That’s right, wanderer. Our preparations are complete. You didn’t miss anyone on the way here, did you?”

“No, I didn’t see anyone at all. They are all in the village.”

She casually lied.

She did not look back.

“Then let’s get this search-and-destroy mission started, Beatrice. We have high hopes for your work here.”

On that day, Boo Boo had lots of fun. He fished with a girl who seemed like an older sister yet retained her innocence and then he excitedly returned to the village expecting everyone to praise him. When he showed them the basket full of fish, they were sure to accept that Beatrice was an amazing person and they would let him tell her where the village was.

But by then, it was all over and nothing remained.

Nothing at all.

No one at all.

Afterword

This is Kamachi Kazuma.

That was Volume 2! Now we can actually call this a series.

In Volume 1, I focused on establishing what kind of place Grandnir is and the real world(?) was fairly neglected, so I focused on Earth, Japan, and Tokyo this time. But that is still a twisted world. Even if they can't use it there, how would people think and act in a world where Magic is known to exist? I think this was an interesting thought experiment. Grandnir was based on a fantasy RPG, so I made chaotic Tokyo more of a modern RPG. The school's student council explores a labyrinth afterschool, you have to move around underground pathways while avoiding the monsters wandering around, and the Ministry of Defense performs serious experiments in creating occult weapons. Doesn't that have its own kind of romance?

This introduced the remnants of giant structures in Grandnir such as the Next Voyager and the Enter Kosmos. If you look into what those names are based on, you might be able to imagine how history played out in this series. ...If another world existed and it would lead to technological revolutions through Magic and Pieces, wouldn't the world powers put as much effort into that as they did to plant their flag on the moon? It might not have much to do with the actual plot, but I love adding those extraneous elements to help build up the world.

If you understand the connection between the flag on the moon and Grandnir, you might be able to better picture why someone as powerful as Beatrice is confined to the Detached Magic Palace and why it is considered

such a threat when she broke out. Yes, the rockets that fly to the moon can easily be converted into missiles.

So the disaster this time may have been like a giant rock falling from the moon toward the humans who are learning so much by sending probes to the moon. This unique Break News caused great damage when it was thought things could only go the other way. It was all for her beloved, but Tselika hid that gentle reason behind a veil of selfishness and greed as she sent shockwaves through 2 worlds with a malicious smile on her face. She may have been the most human one of all, but I will leave it to all of you to judge her.

I think I will develop this story with a focus on the romance between Boo Boo and Beatrice, but love does not always lead to positive and heartwarming results. I was trying to use Succubus Tselika and that man to show that here.

Tselika Wien Alpha Chelydia Lumidrier.

I'd be impressed if you remembered the full name. I borrowed just the name from a character in my previous series (is that what I should call it?).

There are all sorts of different demons, but I always think of the Succubus before the big names like Satan or Lucifer. Maybe that's because the big names have enough of a fixed image that they're harder to use in a story. And just as the novel mentioned, the Succubus is a lower demon and yet they have the special skill(?) to create a physical body. That fact may have tugged at my heartstrings.

And the Thousand Dragon returned this time.

I was trying to see if I could create a story from her(!?) point of view and have a battle that made use of her 1000 meter body, but how did I do?

The point of the Break News is to show the different ways you can develop the idea of “the strongest”, but I think the Thousand Dragon has the most obvious “strength” of that group.

A heated battle and the tearfulness of a picture book. Not everyone who hits those criteria is a good person, but I wanted this world to have the kindness to allow her to save someone and recover from her defeat. How did you like that warmth?

I give my thanks to my illustrator Mahaya-san and my editors Miki-san, Onodera-san, and Anan-san. With monsters strolling through Tokyo, this had to have been a lot of work different again from full-on fantasy. Sorry for making you go to so much effort yet again.

And I give my thanks to the readers. Just as Grandnir has its stories, the real world has its stories. That was what I focused on for Volume 2, but what did you think? I’m glad that Beatrice, Filinion, and Armelina are just as attached to each other in Tokyo.

And I will end this here.

How did she modify her muscular beloved’s armor to end up with that?

-Kamachi Kazuma

Translator's Notes and References

1. [Jump up](#) Ushigashira means “cow head”.